Ian Charles Harris

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E. J. BRILL

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BY

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For Gwen, Joseph, Saoirse and Catherine

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PREFACE

This book started life as a doctoral thesis presented at the University of Lancaster in 1985. Since that time a good deal of scholarly effort has been expended in re-examining the relationship between the early schools of Indian *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and I have attempted, where appropriate, to draw on these fresh insights in the present text. While it is probably true to say that *Madhyamaka* philosophy has received a major share of the attention of English speaking scholars, a gentle shift to the *Yogācāra* is now underway, particularly in the U.S.A. One must, of course, be aware of the more positive treatment given to the *Yogācāra* on the continent of Europe and this is, no doubt, in some part due to the differing philosophical and cultural proclivities in that geographical region. Anyone embarking on work in this field must therefore be aware of their enormous debt to scholars such as Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Sylvain Lévi, Eric Frauwallner, Étienne Lamotte and Lambert Schmithausen for substantial labours already completed. The problem for the present writer has been in the drawing together of sources generally confined to hermetically sealed compartments in an attempt to reassess the overall development of the early *Mahāyāna* tradition of thought. I am all too well aware of my lack of competence in many facets of this work, not the least my lack of knowledge of relevant Chinese materials, and am conscious of the many loose ends and vague generalisations which I have been forced to make. A great deal still needs to be done on the reasons for, and background to, the new terminology of the *Yogācāra*, for instance. Similarly a more in depth treatment of the relationship between spiritual practice and philosophy in a religious context, particularly in the early *Mahāyāna* period, would greatly enhance our overall appreciation of the interconnections between individual Buddhist thinkers. Nevertheless I am encouraged to publish the results of my deliberations, despite their provisional nature, since many of my conclusions appear, at least partially, congruent with those of other researchers. I dare say that some of the views expressed in this book will need to be modified in the light of constructive criticism, but my hope is that this work will at the least stimulate debate in this exciting area of Buddhist studies.

Not surprisingly my views have undergone a good deal of evolution since I started work in this field a decade ago and I would particularly like to thank Dr Andrew Rawlinson for his encouragement and valuable comments. It is astonishing how a discussion on forms of negation in Buddhist logic can naturally progress to considerations of life in other solar systems, but perhaps this demonstrates the relevance of such studies in our

present age! Professor Ninian Smart and Dr David Bairstow have both read early drafts of this text and I am grateful to them for a number of suggestions which I have been more than happy to incorporate. I am especially indebted to the kind assistance given to me by Professor Christian Lindtner in preparing this work for publication. His work on Nāgārjuna, Bhāvaviveka and Kambala has been a tremendous inspiration to a new generation of younger researchers and his compendious knowledge and thoughtful criticism have helped me to appreciate the decisive role played by Bhavya in the late *Madhyamaka* attitude to the *Yogācāra*.

In view of the generous help and guidance given to me from so many sources it is a matter of regret that many matters are not resolved to my satisfaction. This of course is entirely due to my own insufficient theoretical and practical grasp of the texts.

A number of institutions have supported me with generous grants and scholarships throughout various stages of this work. Thanks are therefore due to the Department of Education and Science for the award of a Major State Studentship (1978–1981), to the late K.D.D. Henderson CMG (Secretary) and the Trustees of the Spalding Trust for their help in providing the funding necessary to bring this research to the light of day, and finally to the Research Committee of S. Martin's College, Lancaster for their generous offer of assistance over the last two years. May I also register my thanks to Julie Robinson for the tedious business of transferring the manuscript text to disk, and Martin Lister Publishing Services for his technical advice.

All that remains is to thank Gwen for her endless patience and support.

INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of this book will be to re-examine the relationship between the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* in early Indian *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. It may be said that I have attempted to minimise the differences between these two great movements of thought, and this is certainly the case. Nevertheless I am fully aware of the substantial discrepancies of style, scope and terminology which may be traced across the work of the respective representatives of these traditions and I hope that I shall not be accused of uncritical assimilation in this context. My purpose will be to uncover the methodological and philosophical presuppositions present in the writings of authorities on *Mahāyāna* Buddhist thought, be they ancient or modern.

In the first chapter the intention will be to demonstrate that Nāgārjuna implicitly accepts a distinction between the enlightened and the unenlightened state. These two modes of being may be understood as mental states. The former will then be represented by the Sanskrit terms *jñāna/prajñā*, while the latter corresponds to *vijñāna*. The essential difference between the two is that *vijñāna* is contaminated by a variety of mental concomitants such as dichotomous thought (*prapañca*) and discrimination (*vikalpa*), while *jñāna* is not. Conditioned by ignorance (*avidyā*), *vijñāna* is unable to reproduce a true picture of things. The world appears to be constructed of substantial entities. The arising of *jñāna* brings about the destruction of this erroneous world view. Through *jñāna* things are understood not as independent, but as interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*). However, and this is a discussion which is examined in more detail in chapter five, since language is itself a form of expression entirely implicated in the distorted world view, it follows that the truth about reality must be inexpressible.

Chapter two examines the logical stance taken by Nāgārjuna. This clearly shows that he does not always adhere to the *prasaṅga* method often associated with him. His method is based on certain axioms common to Buddhist tradition as a whole, and one would be wrong, in consequence, in seeing him as an independent thinker. It is the view of this author that Nāgārjuna both adheres to the doctrine of the inexpressibility of truth, and maintains the existence of an indeterminate truth realm. As such he is not a nihilist. Truth must be revealed beyond the borders of language. In a sense then it would be correct to say that for Nāgārjuna the true nature of things lies midway between the dichotomies inherent in language; i.e. between existence and non-existence. The structure of language cannot exhaust the way things truly are. This being the case, Nāgārjuna does not deny the existence of reality nihilistically. In consequence, one may be

inclined to admit an ontologically indeterminate realm, a realm which cannot be determined in terms of existence or non-existence. The doctrine emptiness of (*śūnyatā*) is intimately tied to this. The true nature of things is dependently originated (*pratītyasamutpanna*). This state of affairs is falsely cognised in the unenlightened state. Enlightenment (*bodhi*) represents the mind purged of ignorance (*avidyā*). *Bodhi* then is *śūnyatā* in the sense that it is empty of the defilements of ignorance. *Śūnyatā* is not a term with ontological significance, but rather a state in which there is a true identification of cogniser and cognised, but regrettably a state incapable of articulation.

In chapter three Nāgārjuna's connection with early Buddhism is analysed and a general continuity of thought discovered. The chapter continues by examining the *nirvāṇa/saṃsāra* dichotomy in the light of foregoing discussions. As a result *nirvāṇa* can be clearly associated with *bodhi* – that state of mind in which the dichotomies generated by *prapañca* have been eradicated, while *saṃsāra* becomes identified with the world picture composed through the agency of *vijñāna*. Neither *nirvāṇa* nor *saṃsāra* then are ontological terms. On the contrary, they are shown to be orientations to one ontic, unpredictable, realm which is itself the base for the arising of both *vijñāna* and *jñāna/prajñā*.

With chapter four attention is turned to the *Yogācāra*. We question the view of the older generation of scholars who wished to establish radical differences between this school and the position of Nāgārjuna. We show that many of these attempts are based on an interpretation of Nāgārjuna's teaching through the agency of Candrakīrti, and on certain presuppositions inherited from the history of Western thought. Candrakīrti's understanding of *Yogācāra* was that it was preliminary to the study of *Madhyamaka*. We are able to show that this is simply not so. Candrakīrti misunderstands the basis of *Yogācāra* teachings and attributes views to them which they do not in fact hold. Candrakīrti's analysis is not of course a new element in the *Madhyamaka* arsenal but depends to a great extent on the prior arguments of Bhāvaviveka with the *Yogācāra*. these are analysed in some detail. On closer examination, the axioms of the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* are found to be held fundamentally in common. The idea of an initiatory scheme of Buddhist teaching, with the *Madhyamaka* in pre-eminent position is shown to be a fairly late development in the history of Indian *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, and in may respects out of sympathy with a correct understanding of the *Yogācāra*.

The important doctrine of the levels of truth as it crops up throughout the history of Buddhist thought is explored in chapters five and six. We discover a bewildering assortment of differing formulations which can, however, be simplified quite consistently. Two strands can be identified in the early material. Both are underpinned by a theory of language, though

these theories are divergent. In the first theory two separate areas of discourse may be identified; implicit (*nītattha*) language about-things, and that which is termed explicit (*neyattha*). The former is in accordance with conventional usage, while the latter reflects the Buddhist understanding of reality. The latter is therefore accurate and supplies a true picture of the world. This particular teaching is the forerunner of the dharma theory of the *Abhidharma* which seems to be refuted, or at least amended, in the writings of the *Mahāyāna*. In the *Abhidharma*, language, which takes into account the dharmic constitution of things, is said to be ultimately true (*paramattha*), while language which does not is only conventionally so (*sammuti*).

The second theory of truths, i.e. that which is developed in the *Mahāyāna*, can also be found in the early tradition. This doctrine is entirely consistent with the understanding of language discussed in chapters one and two and accepted by both the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*. According to this way of thinking, whatever is expressed is essentially contaminated by *vijñāna* and its mental concomitants, and as such constitutes a false picture of things. Ultimately truth, and hence the teaching of the Buddha, is equated with silence. Truth then may not be attained through rational enquiry, but rather through its elimination. The problem with this particular formulation is that in accepting it one is automatically led to its corrolary; i.e. that everything which is expressed is false. The doctrine of three natures (*trisvabhāva*) expounded in the *Prajñāpāramitā* and by the *Yogācara sūtras* and *śāstras* is an attempt to show that the two truth doctrine should not be taken in such a manner. There are no essential differences between the two and three nature formulations – the latter simply makes explicit what was implicit in the former. This takes us back to our distinction between an ontologically inderterminate realm and its two epistemic orientations. In the *Madhyamaka* it is quite clear that the ultimate (*paramārtha*) and the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) truths refer to the perspectives associated with *jñāna* and *vijñāna* respectively. Now, chapter three demonstrated that these viewpoints only have efficacy because they relate to the ontic realm identified with *pratītysamutpāda*. Examination of early *Madhyamaka* thought clearly reveals a hidden central term, though it is less hidden in Bhāvaviveka's thought than in Candrakīrti's. Hidden of course because it is not amenable to articulation. The three nature theory then merely supplies this seemingly missing term, while at the same time recognising its essential non-predictability. It is difficult to maintain that the teachings of the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* are at odds on this particular point if this is the case. The diagram below will clarify matters.

Paratantra (*Pratītyasamutpāda*)		The ontologically indeterminate base
Parikalpita	*Pariniṣpanna*	
Saṃvṛti	*Paramārtha*	The two orientations
Defilement	Purification	
DIFFERENCE	IDENTITY	

Chapter seven looks at the nature of the base for the appearance of the defiled and purified visions of things in more detail and finds that the Buddhist tradition as a whole supports the stance taken by both the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogācāra*. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is the key concept in both Buddhist systems. It is identical with the way things truly are, and as such is inexpressible. It provides the rational for the workings of the Four Noble Truths and hence for the apparent existences of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Two separate treatments of *pratītyasamutpāda* are actually found in Buddhist literature. Firstly, the fundamental doctrine itself which was discovered by, though is seemingly independent of, the Buddha. Secondly we have the twelve-linked formula. While the former is itself identical with the inexplicably true state of things, the twelve-fold formula is a rationalisation of the two epistemic orientations and as such helps to explain the Four Noble Truths. The forward sequence corresponds to the first and second truths, while the reverse is connected with the third and fourth. These different treatments of *pratītyasamutpāda* exactly mirror the two and three-fold truth formulations as expounded in the previous two chapters.

The body of this book is an attempt to argue against the traditional, scholarly view that the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogācāra* present two radically opposed sets of doctrines. It is hoped that the foregoing discussion will indicate that on a number of grounds, this traditional view is difficult to sustain. One further problem remains however. A great number of scholars believe that what distinguishes the *Yogācāra* from the rest of Buddhism are its idealistic tendencies. The final chapter represents an attempt to test such an attitude. By examining early Buddhist texts concerned with the notion of mind the final chapter argues that, while taken out of context, certain sections of texts may seem idealistc, this is not so when seen against their proper background. From the earliest times Buddhism has recognised the distinction which was treated in the first chapter; namely the distinction between the defiled and the purified mind.

Remembering the fact that ultimate truth is inarticulable, one may equate, at least metaphorically, enlightenment (*bodhi*) with the purified mind, and the unenlightened state with defilement. Talk of a luminous mind (*prabhāsvara citta*) in the *Nikāyas*, and at other places is a clear reference to *bodhi*. However at various stages in its history Buddhism has found the need to explain to its critics how *karma*, and general mental continuity, may be maintained, without at the same time falling into the trap of positing any permanent, unchanging mental entity. This is the function of terms like the limb of existence (*bhavāṅga*) and the *Yogācāra* storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). Both of these concepts should not be confused with a *Brahmanical* absolute such as *ātman*. They both perform an explanatory function while at the same time avoiding the pit falls of absolutism. If this is so it will be difficult to make the charge of idealism stick. The principle difference between the *Yogācāra* and *Madhyamaka* on this point is that for the former questions of mental continuity are crucial in the attempt to argue agains *Brahmanic* tendencies, while for the latter they are not. However the *Yogācāra* does follow a traditional line on this matter, and does not, as in the case of the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) introduce any surprisingly novel concepts. Chapter eight then provides the final link in the argument. There is a certain continuity of thought from the early period, through *Madhyamaka* to the *Yogācāra*. The doctrine of *ālayavijñāna* represents no substantial deviation from tradition. In fact the only matters which differentiate such individual elements of tradition may be demonstrated to be ones basically indicative of preoccupation and not of essential disunity. The differing terminologies associated with Nāgārjuna and the *Yogācāra* are explained accordingly. For the former issues of logic and ontology are to the fore. In the writings of the latter, while these matters are of importance, psychological and soteriological considerations are more prominent.

CHAPTER ONE

A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF MADHYAMAKA ONTOLOGY

In the past many assumptions have been made concerning the relationship between the *Madhyamaka* and *Vijñānavāda* schools of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism which on further analysis may prove to be unfounded. Typically the *Vijñānavādin* is seen as someone who wishes to hypostatise consciousness (*vijñāna, citta, vijñapti*) leading to the conclusion that consciousness is the sole reality (*vijñaptimātra*). On the other hand the *Madhyamaka* maintains a non-committal attitude towards ontology. It is very easy, particularly given the present nature of scholarship into the subject, to be led into adopting such an attitude but, on further reflection one is forced to ask a number of questions.

In the first place when we speak of the *Madhyamaka* school of thought we ordinarily think, mainly because of its dominant position in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, of the *Madhyamaka-Prāsaṅgika* school founded sometime in the 7th century A.D. by Candrakīrti.[1] That Candrakīrti was an opponent of a particular point of view regarding the doctrine of consciousness only *(cittamātra)* and the existence of a store-consciousness *ālayavijñāna*, both of which are generally associated with the *Vijñānavādins*, there can be no doubt.[2]

However two questions follow from this statement. Firstly, has Candrakīrti faithfully reproduced the doctrines of his root texts which in this case are the writings of Nāgārjuna, and secondly, in his argument with the *Vijñānavāda*, has he adhered to his *prasaṅga* method of reasoning and therefore not ascribed to his opponents doctrines which they do not in fact hold?

The second major query concerns the doctrinal position of Nāgārjuna and in particular the range of Nāgārjuna's authorship. It has been paradigmatic among the older generation of scholars, when dealing with the works of Nāgārjuna to brush aside the evidence of the Buddhist tradition and treat only those works which deal exclusively with the doctrines of

1 Ruegg (1981 p. 71) gives the date c.600–650
A slightly earlier date (530–600) is given by Lindtner in *Acta Orientalia* 40 (1979) p. 91.

2 Candrakīrti's critique of *Vijñānavāda* is to be found in Ch. 6 of his *Madhyamakāvatāra* a partial translation of which was carried out by L. de la Vallée Poussin (1907–11).
The Tibetan text is available (with autocommentary) as *Madhyamakāvatāra par Candrakīrti* edited by L. de la Vallée Poussin (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, reprint, 1970). A detailed investigation of Candrakīrti's argument will be found *supra* Ch. 8.

emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the non-existence of the self nature of *dharmas* (*dharmaniḥsvabhāvatā*) as being exclusively authentic works of our author. T.R.V. Murti is a good case in point. In his study of the *Madhyamaka* he lists the works of Nāgārjuna ascribed by the Tibetan and Chinese tradition[3] and then abandons all but two, the *Madhyamakakārikā*[4] and the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*[5] in the elucidation of the distinctive *Madhyamaka* philosophy, irrespective of the fact that many of the other texts, firmly held to be works of Nāgārjuna by the Buddhist tradition, express ideas which in some respects would lead to an attenuation of the overall doctrine. Such a state of affairs could be compared to one in which for many years a group of researchers based all their knowledge of Shakespeare's work, life and times solely on the sonnets simply because as a corpus a certain underlying theme runs through them all. As a consequence the plays, being formally different and treating disparate themes, are relegated into being the works of others, fraudulently ascribed to the bard.

There seem to be a number of objections to such judgements. In the first place why would someone having produced a major work of literature, and in our case elevating religious discourses, wish to deny authorship and by so doing pass this distinction on to someone whose output was meagre (two works) and in any case died possibly hundreds of years before? Secondly the judgement of authenticity based on doctrinal accord with an axiomatically authentic text, such as the *Madhyamakakārikā* is really just as unsound as judgement based on other criteria, since we have no knowledge of Nāgārjuna's intentions when he embarked on his writing career. This situation has been noted by Buddhist scholars of the younger generation and the tide now seems to be turning in the field of Nāgārjuna studies. The recent publication of a book by Chr. Lindtner[6] perhaps exemplifies more than any others this change of thinking. Although Lindtner regards the authenticity of the *kārikās* as axiomatic he nevertheless applies a number of important criteria to arrive at his list of Nāgārjuna's works. Firstly a work may have been ascribed by a "trustworthy" witness such as Candrakīrti, Bhāvaviveka, Śāntarakṣita and the like. Secondly a work must have a place in a grand scheme which Lindtner wants to propose was really in Nāgārjuna's mind. In other words it needs to be part of a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine and path of Buddhists of the *Mahāyāna* persuasion along the lines of Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*[7]. Thirdly throughout the corpus of texts there should be a general agree-

3 Murti (1960) p. 88–91.
4 cf. *Nāgārjuna's Filosofiske Vaerker* Lindtner (1982) and *Candrakīrti Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti* J. May (1959).
5 *The Vigrahavyāvartanī* Johnson, E. H. & Kunst, A. (eds.) (1951).
6 Lindtner (1982).
7 *La Somme du Grand Véhicule d'Asaṅga* 2 vols. Lamotte, É. (ed. and trans.)(1938).

ment in style, scope and doctrine. As a result of his deliberations Lindtner passes twelve works (in addition to the *kārikās*) as being authentic. These are the *Śūnyatāsaptati*, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, *Catuḥstava*, *Ratnāvalī*, *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayakārikā*, *Sūtrasamuccaya*, *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, *Suhṛllekha* and the *Bodhisambhāra*.

With the *kārikās* themselves, the first five of the above works are held by the Tibetan tradition to belong to the theoretical/scholastic works of Nāgārjuna otherwise known as the logical (*yukti*; Tib: *rigs tshogs*) corpus. P. Williams[8] has subjected Lindtner's method to scrutiny and points out various defects. To start with the first of Lindtner's trustworthy witnesses, Bhāvaviveka, lived approximately 350 years after Nāgārjuna[9], and the others lived a considerable time after that. With regard to consistency in style, scope and doctrine, Williams[10] points out that to be convincing when working from Tibetan and Chinese translations of the original Sanskrit is in itself a highly dubious enterprise. However Williams' most severe criticism is very much in conformity with the views expressed by older scholars mentioned above. He believes that if we hold the authenticity of the *kārikās* as axiomatic then a putative work of Nāgārjuna concerning a topic not dealt with in the *kārikās* is difficult to ascribe since we have left the safety of comparison and have given first priority to witnesses etc. in our criteria of judgement. Williams therefore ends up in the position adopted by D.S. Ruegg who feels that because of the:

> ... opacity and confusion in the records as well as the uncertainty concerning the authorship of several works ascribed to Nāgārjuna, it will be convenient for the historians of the *Madhyamaka* to take as his point of departure the treatise universally considered as the *Madhyamakaśāstra* par excellence—namely the MMK (*Mula-Madhyamakakārikā*)—together with any other texts ascribable to the same author that are doctrinally related, and to regard this textual corpus as a standard of reference when describing Nāgārjuna's philosophy.[11]

As demonstrated there are no good grounds for holding such a position. It is my intention to adopt a modified version of Lindtner's list of authentic works bearing in mind the criticisms of Williams, who admits "... my caution is not damning. It is simply caution".[12] As both the Tibetan and Chinese tradition are unanimous and Lindtner's analysis confirms tradition I intend to work on the basis that the texts of the logical (*yukti*) corpus are original works of Nāgārjuna.

However before turning to an examination of the doctrines of the

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8 Williams (1984).

9 For the dates of Nāgārjuna, vide Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 4 n. 11. Ruegg places Nāgārjuna "early in the first millenium PC."

10 Williams *op. cit.* p. 75.

11 Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 8–9.

12 Williams *op. cit.* p.76.

kārikās, which must nevertheless still be considered the most important of the texts from the point of view of the development of the latter *Madhyamaka* tradition, let us look briefly at the other works mentioned to find any evidence which can confirm the often expressed opinion that the *Madhyamaka* and the *Vijñānavāda* are doctrinally irreconcilable systems of thought.

ONTOLOGICAL SPECULATION IN NĀGĀRJUNA'S SUBSIDIARY WORKS

In the first place it must be quite clearly stated that nowhere in the corpus of works which we accept are authentically those of Nāgārjuna, is there to be found an explicit condemnation of the notion that *prajñā* represents a state of awareness in which things are seen as they are (*yathābhūta*). This is a very surprising fact given Nāgārjuna's insistence that all phenomena (*dharma*) are empty (*śūnya*) since they lack own-being (*svabhāva*) because they occur only in mutual dependence (*pratītyasamutpanna*).

> That which has arisen dependently on this and that, that has not arisen substantially (*svabhāvata*). That which has not arisen substantially, how can it literally (*nāma*) be called arisen?[13]

The nearest we find Nāgārjuna coming to a specific criticism of consciousness is his demonstration that *vijñāna*, as a member of the group of *skandhas*, is dependent and hence empty. This may be found in chapter four of the *Madhyamakakārikās*. However *vijñāna* in this treatment is always considered as a thing dependent on internal and external sense-fields (*āyatana*) and can not be equated with the notion of an abiding consciousness such as the *bhavaṅga* put forward in the Pali texts and subsequently elaborated by the *Yogācāra*. These particular doctrines will be examined in detail in chapter eight of this work. However it should be noted that Nāgārjuna's understanding of *vijñānaskandha* is totally in accord with that of the earliest Buddhist writings. Of equal importance is the fact that the *Vijñānavādins* also adopt such a position. For them the six evolved consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), since they arise in dependence, must from the ultimate point of view be considered to be empty (*śūnya*). This seems to be all that Nāgārjuna means when he says:

> Consciousness (*vijñāna*) occurs dependent upon the internal and external sense-fields (*āyatana*). There consciousness is empty (*śūnya*), like mirages and illusions (*marīcimāyāvat*). Since consciousness (*vijñāna*) arises dependent on a discernible object (*vijñeya*), the discernible does not exist (in itself).[14]

13 *Yuktisaṣṭikā-kārika* (*YṢ*) in *Nagarjuniana* Lindtner *op. cit.* p. 102–119
YṢ. v. 19.
tat tat prapya yad utpannaṃ notpannaṃ tat svabhāvataḥ
svabhāvena yan notpannaṃ utpannaṃ nāma tat kathaṃ
cf. *VV.* 22 and *MMK.* xxiv. 18.

14 *Śūnyatāsaptati-kārikā* (*Ś.S.*) *ibid.* p. 34–69

Both consciousness and the external object then are dependent and consequently devoid of own-being (*svabhāva*).

It is a curious fact that the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* is the only work attributed by tradition to Nāgārjuna which features an obvious critique of a position similar to that adopted by the *Vijñānavāda*. However this work is never mentioned by Candrakīrti, the only trustworthy witness for its authenticity being Bhāvaviveka in his *Ratnapradīpa*.[15] In this text the author attacks the three nature doctrine often associated with the *Yogācāra*:

> .. the imagined (*parikalpita*), the dependent (*paratantra*) and the absolute (*pariniṣpanna*) have only one nature of their own: emptiness. They are the imaginations (*kalpanā*) of mind (*citta*).[16]

but one must be aware of the fact that this is a standard canonical devise, found amongst other places in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, a textual source for the *Yogācāra* itself. Thus:

> When intelligently investigated, there is no imagined [nature], no dependent [nature] and no absolute [nature]. How then can they be intelligently discriminated?[17]

As we shall see later[18] the notion that the three natures are ultimately empty is one quite acceptable to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu themselves. Further on in the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* we hear that:

> Mind (*citta*) is but a name (*nāmamātra*). It is nothing apart form (its) name. Consciousness must be regarded as but a name. The name has no own-being (*svabhāva*).[19]

ŚS. v. 56–7.
naṅ daṅ phyi yi skye mched la
brten nas rnam par śes pa 'byuṅ
de lta bas na rnam śed med
smig rgyu sgyu ma bźin du stoṅ
rnam śes śes bya la brten nas
'byun la śes bya yod ma yin
śes bya śes pa med pa'i phyir
de phyir śes pa po ñid med

15 *ibid.* p. 180.

16 *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* v. 28
kun brtags daṅ ni gźan dbaṅ daṅ
yoṅs su grub pa 'di ñid ni
stoṅ ñid bdag ñid gcig pu yi
ṅo bo sems la brtags pa yin.

17 *Laṅka.* II. 198.
buddhyā vicecyamānaṃ tu na tantraṃ nāpi kalpitaṃ
niṣpanno nāsti vai bhāvaḥ kathaṃ buddhyā vikalpyate.

18 cf. ch. 6 *infra*.

19 *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* v. 40.
sems ni miṅ tsam yin pa ste

Now if Nāgārjuna is the author of this text one wonders why he is not aware of the fact that this statement is liable to give rise to the objection outlined at the beginning of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, an objection we will discuss in more depth in chapter two. The opponent in this text asks how it is possible for Nāgārjuna to maintain the truth if he also allows that all things are empty. Since emptiness applies to words themselves, how can they be used for the purpose of demonstrating such truth? On applying ourselves to the statement that mind (*citta*) is merely a name and hence has no own-being, we are met by incoherence. In the first place the logic of the claim is confused and in the second, even if we were to accept that names have no *svabhāva*, we would be unjustified in making the assumption that the object denoted by the name, i.e. mind (*citta*) is also devoid of *svabhāva*.

Actually reading through the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* carefully, one is struck by many inconsistencies. The author at one point reverses his critique of the *Vijñānavāda* by affirming a central doctrine of the school. Thus

> The (Buddha's) instruction about the aggregates, elements etc. (merely) aims at dispelling the belief in a self (*ātmagraha*). By establishing (themselves) in consciousness only (*cittamātra*) the greatly blessed (*bodhisattvas*) also abandon that (instruction).[20]

Returning to our theme let us ask ourselves a question. If Nāgārjuna is totally opposed to the existence of a mind, would he not also be concerned to refute notions which rely for their existence and efficaciousness on such a mental substratum? I am in particular thinking of terms which are derived from the verbal root *jñā*. We can answer this question to the contrary. Nāgārjuna uses many terms of this type that indicate the fact that knowledge (*jñāna*) seems to exist from the ultimate point of view. Thus we are told in the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā-kārikā*:

> Just as the Buddhas have spoken of "my" and "I" for pragmatic reasons, thus they have also spoken of the aggregates (*skandha*), the sense-fields (*āyatana*) and the elements (*dhātu*) for pragmatic reasons. The great elements etc. (*mahābhūtādi*) are absorbed in consciousness (*vijñāna*). They are dissolved by understanding them. Certainly they are falsely imagined (*mithyā vikalpitam*).[21]

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miṅ las gźan du 'ga' yaṅ med
miṅ tsam du ni rnam rig blta
miṅ yaṅ raṅ bźin med pa yin.

20 *Bodhicittavivaraṅa* v. 25
bdag tu 'dzin pa bzlog pa'i phyir
phuṅ po khams sogs bstan pa yin
sems tsam po la gnas nas ni
skal chen rnams kyis de yaṅ spaṅs.

21 *YṢ.* v. 33–4
dogs pa'i dbaṅ gis rgyal ba rnams
ṅa daṅ ṅa'i źes gsuṅs pa ltar
phuṅ po khams daṅ skye mched rnams

Here then two separate domains of knowledge are explicated. The first, with referents such as "I" and "mine", has a pragmatic truth value which on a higher level is seen as characterised by false imagination. A higher form of knowledge appears to be born when the notions at the pragmatic level are dissolved in understanding (*tajjñāne vigamaṃ*).[22] It seems difficult to believe that Nāgārjuna would refute the notion of mind while at the same time adhering to this distinction between forms of knowledge. Knowledge seems to presuppose some mental apparatus through which the former gains efficacy.

In the above quotation from the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā-kārikā* we have the classical distinction between a mundane form of consciousness usually associated with the term *vijñāna*, and a higher level from of consciousness to which Nāgārjuna gives the name *jñāna* or *prajñā*. These two forms of consciousness reflect the two level of truth doctrine held by all the *Madhyamakas* (and as we shall see, in chapters five and six, by all the Buddhist schools) and would appear to represent the mechanisms by which the world view of an ordinary person (*pṛthagjana*) and a saint (*ārya*) differ. However this point of view is not peculiar to the *Madhyamakas*. The distinction is made in *Abhidharmakośa*:

> En effet la connaissance spéculative (*prajñā*) par laquelle on pénètre et comprend, a le même domaine (*viṣaya*) que la connaissance vulgaire (*vijñāna*).[23]

and la Vallée Poussin goes on to say:

> D'après les *Vibhajyavādins*, le *jñāna* est bon en soi; le *vijñāna* est bon quand il est associé à *jñāna* (*Kośa* iv 8b, p33 n.3): ce qui peut s'entendre que le *jñāna* est le "savoir supramondain", et que le *vijñāna* savoir mondain, est bon lorsqu'il est consécutif au savoir supramondain.[24]

The precise definition of these various psychological terms, all of which are derived from the root *jñā* is a matter of some debate among scholars and will be left to a more suitable occasion for detailed discussion, but at least one point is already clear. This is the distinction between the mundane form of knowledge designated by the term *vijñāna* and the knowledge, or knowledges, of a higher order termed *jñāna* or *prajñā*. It seems in

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de bźin dgos pa'i dbaṅ gis gsuṅs
'byuṅ ba che la sogs bśad pa
rnams par śes su yaṅ dag 'du
de śes pas ni 'bral 'gyur na
log pas rnam brtags ma yin nam.

22 This verse (*YṢ*. v. 34) is also cited in the *Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvali* cf. Thakur, A. (ed.) *Jñānaśrīmitranibandhāvali* Patna (1959) p. 545 and 405.

23 *Abhidharmakośa* ed. par L. de la Vallée Poussin (1971)
AK. ix. 244: *prajñāvijñānayoḥ samānaviṣayatvāt.*

24 *AK*. ix. 248 n.v.

fact that *prajñā* and *jñāna* are more or less interchangeable terms. J. May tells us that:

> ... il existe entre *citta* et *prajñā* la même opposition qu'entre *vijñāna* et *jñāna*, connaissance empirique discursive et connaissance métaphysique intuitive.[25]

In Nāgārjuna's system one of the fundamental features is the emphasis on the development of higher order forms of knowledge. This is stated again and again. Thus:

> When one sees that which arises conditioned by ignorance (*avidyāpratyaya*) with a correct knowledge (*samyagjñāna*), no origination (*utpāda*) or destruction (*nirodha*) whatsoever is perceived (*upalabhyate*).[26]

When someone has developed this correct knowledge (*samyagjñāna*) then reality (*tattva*) is seen clearly and ignorance (*avidyā*) is destroyed. It follows that since *avidyā* is the first link in the twelve fold chain of mutual dependence (*dvādasāṅgika-pratītyasamutpāda*), it is the cause of *vijñāna* (the third member in the series). Hence when *avidyā* is destroyed by *jñāna* then so too is *vijñāna*. We will examine this in detail in chapter seven. However this is the meaning of *MMK*. xxvi. 11. One who has arrived at such a realisation possesses a mind (*citta*) without a standpoint (*sthāna*).[27] He achieves the eye of knowledge (*jñānacakṣu*)[28] and in consequence the errors of defilement (*kleśadoṣa*), that torment due to false knowledge (*mithyājñāna*), do not arise.[29]

Now most scholars recognise that the task of Nāgārjuna was partly to bring about an integration of the thought contained in that corpus of literature generally called *Prajñāpāramitā* (*P.P.*). Murti typifies this notion:

> The *Mādhyamika* philosophy is a systematisation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* treatises.[30]

A typical and early text of the *P.P.* corpus is the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. In this work the perfection (*pāramitā*) of *prajñā* is mentioned in a number of places as the chief of the other five perfections (i.e. *dāna*—charity, *śīla*—morality, *kṣāntia*—forbearance, *dhyāna*—meditation and *vīrya*—heroic energy) in the sense that it is a guiding and regulating factor by which the other five may operate effectively. To quote Murti again:

25 *Candrakīrti Prasannapadā Madhyamakvṛtti* traduit par J. May (1959) p. 104 n. 252.

26 *YṢ*. v. 10.
ma rig rkyen gyis byuṅ ba la
yaṅ dag ye śes kyis gzigs na
skye ba daṅ ni 'gags pa'an ruṅ
'ga' yaṅ dmigs par mi 'gyur ro.

27 *YṢ*. v. 51.

28 *YṢ*. v. 54

29 *YṢ*. v. 57.

30 Murti *op. cit.* p. 213.

> A mind swayed by passions and attached to the world cannot know the truth; the distracted mind (*samāhita citta*) is incapable of perceiving the truth for lack of steadiness in attention. All the other *pāramitās* are meant to purify the mind and make it fit to receive *the intuition of the absolute* (*prajñā*). It is *Prajñāpāramitā* again that can complete them, make each of them a *pāramitā* ...[31]

Given these facts, we will have difficulty in disagreeing with Lindtner's contention that in all the works of Nāgārjuna that we are considering to be authentic, the notion and explication of one single *pāramitā* (i.e. *prajñā*) is central.[32] This is because it is as the result of *prajñā* that a person embarked on a spiritual path is able to transcend the commonsense (*vyavahāra*) world view which sees things (*dharmas*) with respect to their characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) and own-being (*svabhāva*). He or she opens a field of cognition in which, ultimately, these things do not exist in the way they were formerly imputed but rather, are empty (*śūnya*) of such defining marks as *lakṣaṇa* and *svabhāva*. If we did wish to make a clear distinction between *prajñā* and *jñāna* we could do no better than to endorse Lindtner's view that:

> The culmination of *prajñā* ... is *jñāna*, or intuitive insight into reality (*tattva*) beyond the duality of (is) *asti* and (is not) *nāsti*. This *jñāna* is also the suspension of *avidyā* which, as we have seen, in the final analysis is based on the wrong assumption of existence and non-existence etc.[33]

In the texts we are dealing with, Nagarjuna does not define either of these two terms but we may safely assume that while *prajñā* is a continually evolving faculty dependent on the path and involving analysis, *jñāna* is the end result and, in consequence, is entirely empty (*śūnya*) of the miscellaneous defilements.

One of the major features shared by both the *Madhyamaka* and the *Vijñānavāda* is the notion that ignorance (*avidyā*) has as its root characteristic, the dichotomising tendencies of the common sense worldview. The *Vijñānavādins* give pride of place to the false distinction between subject and object (*grāhyagrāhakakalpanā*). For Vasubandhu therefore, when the mind is at work in an ordinary person a transformation takes place such that the distinction between being conscious of something (*vijñāna*) and that something of which one is conscious (*vijñeya*) arises. This process is called representation (*vijñapti*). Of course this does not mean that the *vijñapti* is caused by *vijñāna*. On the contrary, from the *vijñapti* proceeds the *vijñāna/vijñeya* combination which in turn produces the idea of subjects and objects (*grāhya-grāhaka*). This is the sense of the *Vijñānavādin* doctrine that everything is representation only (*vijñaptimātra*). This does not

31 *ibid.* p. 267. My italicising
cf. *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* (Bibliotheca Indica) p. 398.

32 *op. cit.* p. 268.

33 *ibid.* p. 270.

necessarily imply the idealistic connotation that many authors have seen fit to put on it. For Vasubandhu reality is observed through the subject/object dichotomy:

> This transformation of *vijñāna* is a (falsely constructed) dichotomy (of subject and object). That which is falsely reconstructed is not real. Therefore this everything is nothing but representation (*vijñaptimātra*).[34]

A doctrine of a quite similar style is also maintained by Nāgārjuna. The *Śūnyatāsaptatikārikā*, for instance, seems to demonstrate that the reality of things lies between the two extremes of permanence (*śāśvata*) and annihilation (*uccheda*):

> If there is being (*sat*) there is permanence; if there is non-being (*asat*) there is necessarily annihilation ... To experience the two as mutually excluding (*parasparaviparyaya*) is a mistake (*viparyaya*) ... Therefore it is not logical that *nirvāṇa* is being and non-being.[35]

Another way in which these dichotomously opposed principles lead to errors regarding the way the true state of things, is described in the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā-kārikā* where we are told that:

> Those whose intelligence (*buddhi*) has transcended being and non-being (*astināsti*), and is unsupported, have discovered the profound and inobjective meaning of condition (*pratyaya*).[36]

Being and non-being are only one pair of opposites which are inappropriate for use when talking of reality. The mind addicted to discursive thought (*vikalpa*) automatically generates such sets in its doomed attempt to describe reality. Thus:

> When (someone) cognises (something) as born or unborn, present or gone, bound or liberated (then) he maintains duality (*dvaya*) (and consequently) does not know the truth (*tattva*).[37]

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34 *Triṃś.* 17
vijñānapariṇāmo 'yaṃ vikalpo yad vikalpyate
tena tan nāsti tenedaṃ sarvaṃ vijñaptimātrakaṃ
Lévi, S. (ed.) *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi: Deux traites de Vasubandhu (1925).*

35 *ŚS.* v. 21–25.

36 *YṢ.* v. 1
astināstivyatikrāntā buddhir yeṣāṃ nirāśrayā
gambhīras tair niralambaḥ pratyayārtho vibhāvyate
Tibetan:
gaṅ dag gi blo yod med las
rnam par 'das śiṅ mi gnas pa
de dag gis ni rkyen gyi don
zab mo dmigs med rnam par rtogs

37 *Catuḥstava* v. 28 (*Acintyastava*)
jātaṃ tathaiva no jātam āgataṃ gatam ity api
buddho muktas tathā jñānī dvayam icchen na tattvavit
cf. Lindtner *op. cit.* p. 148–9.

That the *Vijñānavāda* prefer one pair of opposites over any other to demonstrate that the nature of things cannot be adequately shown by their application may be simply a matter of convenience. Any pair would do. The point is that knowledge devoid of thought construction (*nirvikalpajñāna*) is knowledge devoid of dichotomy (*advayajñāna*). Some authors, such as Kunst,[38] believe that by positing such a non-dual knowledge both of the schools of Buddhist philosophy are guilty of contradicting the law of the excluded middle. Ruegg[39] disagrees here. For him:

> ... to say that something is neither A nor non A ($\bar{A}$) does not represent an attempt on the part of the *Mādhyamika* to define some entity (*bhāva*, i.e. a thing possessing *svabhāva*) that is neither A nor $\bar{A}$ (indeterminate), but rather a way of stating the Buddhist theory of conditionship in terms of the *Madhyamaka* doctrine of emptiness of own being (*svabhāvaśūnyatā*) and non-substantially of all factors (*dharmanairātmya*).

This means that while complementary and extreme positions based on the dichotomising activities of ordinary people are excluded from the *Mādhyamika* conception of the Middle Way, Ruegg does not feel that the laws of excluded middle or of non-contradiction are being rejected, since no entity is posited. I do not accept Ruegg's reasoning here. By the rejection of false dichotomies an entity or a state is still posited, though from an ontological point of view its status must be considered indeterminate. The Buddhist position is not fully defined by either Kunst or Ruegg. In a way one may agree that the law of excluded middle is being broken, but not in the classical sense since the middle term has a quite different ontological status from the two alternatives. The law of excluded middle is not really applicable here. Ruegg is equally guilty of adhering to Western forms of reasoning by maintaining that the law is being obeyed. Ruegg rejects Western conceptions when this suits him however:

> ... ultimate reality ... is the domain of what Candrakīrti terms *tattvalakṣaṇa* proper, as accessible to the gnosis (*jñāna*) of the perfected saints (*ārya*).[40]

This seems to be an acceptance of intuitive, non-rational thought. As a matter of fact, when pressed by an opponent, in his commentary on *MMK*. xv. 2, Candrakīrti gives a number of metaphorical designations (*upādāya prajñapti*) for this ontologically indeterminate reality. He calls it nature (*prakṛti*) and thusness (*tathatā*),[41] synonyms which are the common property of both *Madhyamaka* and *Vijñānavāda*. This refusal to see the ultimate from any position conditioned by dichotomous thought is taken

38 Kunst (1957) p. 144.

39 Ruegg (1977–8) p. 11.

40 *ibid.* p. 11.

41 *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās of Nāgārjuna, with the Prasannapadā of Candrakīrti* L. de la Vallée Poussin (ed.), Bibliotheca Buddhica (*IV*) Osnabrück (1970) reprint p. 265–5.

up by virtually all *Madhyamakas*, Atiśa being a late, though representative, case. Thus:

> ... (absolute truth) cannot be the object of any kind of conceptual thinking (*kalpanā*) for reality (*tattva*) is not susceptible to various distinctions such as marks of being, non-being, own-being, other-being, truth, untruth, permanence, destruction, eternal, non-eternal, pleasure, pain, pure, impure, self, non-self, empty, non-empty, and unity, difference, origination, cessation etc., for they possess a relative nature.[42]

Among Nāgārjuna's works such statements are echoed in the *Acintyastava* of the *Catuḥstava*[43] and the *maṅgalaśloka* of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*.[44]

If we now ask ourselves the reason why reality is conceived in an erroneous fashion by those who have not achieved *arhatship*, then the answer must be because of *vikalpa* and *prapañca*. In the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*[45] we are given to assume that discrimination (*vikalpa*) and a fickle (*cala*) mind (*manas*) mutually condition one another. In other words incorrect apprehension of reality is the indispensable concomitant of a particular state of mind. Now the term *prapañca* literally means something like "expansion". The *Aṅguttara Nikāya*[46] indicates that the fourteen unexplicated points (*avyākṛtavastu*) such as "Does the Tathāgata exist after death? Does he not exist after death? Does he both exist and not exist after death? Does he neither exist nor not exist after death? etc." are imagined (*prapañcita*). The *Saṃyutta*[47] gives as examples of *prapañca* such statements as "I am", "I shall be", "I shall not be", "I shall not be formed", "I shall be formless", etc. *Prapañca* then is that activity of consciousness that leads us to the belief that we are isolated beings at large in an extended world of plurality. At its root *prapañca* is a dichotomising tendency which endlessly generates principles reliant on the relationship between identity (*ekatva*) and difference (*anyatva*). In other words, because of *prapañca* categories such as self, other, being, non-being, *nirvāṇa*, *saṃsāra*, subject, object, etc. arise. J. May says:

> *Prapañca*, littéralement "expansion", tib. *spros pa*, me paraît designer non pas taut la fonction de pensée discursive, correspondent, sons divers aspects à *vikalpa*, *vitarka*, *vicāra*, que l'opération de cette function, et le resultat de cette opération, c'est-à-dire le monde constitué en objects et concepts distincts.[48]

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42 *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā ad Bodhi(Sattva)caryāvatāra* L. de la Vallée Poussin (ed.) p. 367 quoted in Lindtner. (1981) p. 188.

43 *CS.* III. 37–36.

44 *MMK.* i. 1

45 *YṢ.* v. 36–7

46 *A.* iv. 68f.

47 *S.* iv. 203.

48 *op. cit.* p. 175 n. 562.

The mode by which *prapañca* informs the world picture of the unenlightened is through discursive thought (*vikalpa*), reasoning (*vicāra*), and conjecture (*vitarka*). *Vikalpa* further differentiates the basically dichotomised world produced by *prapañca* until definite views or dogmas (*dṛṣṭi*) are formed. From *vikalpa* concerning being (*bhāva*) and non-being (*abhāva*) the twin heresies of eternalism (*śāśvatadarśaṇa*) and nihilism (*ucchedadarśaṇa*) arise and such an attitude to the world, in turn, gives rise to suffering (*duḥkha*).

> Profane people (*pṛthagjana*) with their positivistic attitude (*bhāvātmaka*) are ... deceived by their own mind (*svacitta*). Those who understand see that things have ... totally arisen as a result of ignorance (*avidyāhetutaḥ*) without beginning, middle or end.[49]

It is *jñāna* that destroys the ignorance (*avidyā*) that arises in connection with *prapañca*. *Prapañca* is seen to be lacking in any real foundation. The activities of *vikalpa* which reify concepts of being (*asti*) and non-being (*nāsti*) are seen, through *jñāna*, as inappropriate to the ultimate understanding of reality (*tattva*). From the ultimate viewpoint everything has been imagined (*kalpanāmātra*):

> Therefore you have declared that all phenomena are merely imagined. Yes, even the imagination through which emptiness is conceived is said to be untrue.[50]

This sounds remarkably like a statement by Vasubandhu or Asaṅga.

The idea of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is central to the thought of Nāgārjuna. The centrality of this doctrine in the Buddhist tradition will be discussed in chapter seven. However, in its general extended sense the twelve fold chain of dependent origination (*dvādaśāṅgapratītyasamutpāda*) is mentioned in Chapter xxvi of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*. It may be the case that the term *pratītyasamutpāda* itself is a metaphorical designation for reality (*tattva*). It would be difficult simply to treat *pratītyasamutpāda* in its twelve-fold form as a theory of causality or conditionally since Nāgārjuna does a thorough refutation of any possible conditions (*pratyaya*) at the beginning of *MMK*. The two verses of the *maṅgalaśloka* seem to confirm this since they speak of a *pratītyasamutpāda* taught by the Buddha. It is said the equate with the shutting off of *prapañca* and is in consequence without destruction, production, neither annihilated nor eternal, neither differentiated nor undifferentiated and without coming or going.

> *anirodhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvataṃ*
> *anekārthamanānārthamanāgamamanirgaṃ*

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49 *YṢ*. v. 24–26.

50 *CS*. III. 36.
kalpanāmātram ity asmāt sarvadharmāh prakāśitāḥ
kalpanāpy asatī proktā yayā śūnyaṃ vikalpyate.

yah pratītyasamutpādaṃ prapañcopaśamaṃ śivaṃ
deśayāmāsa saṃbuddhaḥ taṃ vande vandatām varaṃ

This sounds very much like the earlier discussed idea of reality (*tattva*) which is realised, through *jñāna*, to be free of all dichotomously constructed distinctions. The real must be indeterminate. Hence the *Śūnyatāsaptati*:

> Without one (*eka*) there are not many (*aneka*). Without many one is not possible. Therefore things that rise dependently (*pratītyasamutpanna*) are indeterminable (*animitta*).[51]

Having come to a realisation of *pratītyasamutpāda*, all conventional view points (*dṛṣṭi*) concerning the nature of things are extinguished. Ignorance (*avidyā*) ceases and one comes to understand reality (*tattvajñāna*):

> Those who have come to understand that dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is devoid of origination (*utpāda*) and destruction (*vināśa*) have crossed the ocean of existence consisting of dogmas (*dṛṣṭibhūtabhavārṇava*).[52]

When we turn to this doctrine as expounded in the *MMK* we shall be in a better position to judge its exact status in Nāgārjuna's system. However from what we have seen so far we can at least maintain that the *tattva/pratītyasamutpāda* group of concepts differ in many senses from most other ideas examined by Nāgārjuna. They are never, like other concepts, demonstrated to be totally devoid of own-nature (*svabhāva*) and hence empty (*śūnya*) in the sense of non-existent. How could they be since we are told frequently that they cannot be apprehended in terms of existence nor non-existence? On the contrary they have an ontological status which cannot be determined since all determination depends on the workings of an unenlightened mind i.e. one acted upon by *prapañca*. Like some 20th century European existentialist Nāgārjuna holds that knowledge must always be conditioned by the stranglehold of the verb "to be" on the language we employ, and in consequence all speculation on the nature of things must resort to essentialist terminology. On this basis I agree with Lindtner who says:

> Instead of taking things in terms of *asti* and *nāsti* one should become aware that

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51 *ŚS*. v. 7.
gcig med par ni maṅ po daṅ
maṅ po med par gcig mi 'jug
de phyir rten cin 'brel 'byun bai
dṅos po mtshan ma med pa yin.

52 *YṢ*. v. 23.
gaṅ dag rten cin brel 'byuṅ ba
skye daṅ 'jig pa rnam spaṅs par
śes par gyur pa de dag ni
ltar gyur srid pa'i rgya mtsho brgal.

> all entitites are *pratītyasamutpanna*, without, however, committing the fallacy of conceiving *pratītyasamutpāda* as a fact and by itself.[53]

The fact is that *pratītyasamutpāda* is ontologically indeterminate. In other words it cannot be determined with respect to exclusive categories.

To sum up then it is clear that the term *pratītyasamutpāda* is used in two entirely distinct manners in the writings of this school of Buddhist philosophy. The first may almost be termed an exoteric teaching while the second appears esoteric. In the exoteric we are dealing with the traditional twelve *nidānas*. Using the doctrine heuristically Nāgārjuna is able to show that on the conventional level the basic teachings of the Buddha have a practical validity. As such the danger implicit in the higher truth doctrine (i.e. that by intellectually realising the truth of emptiness (*śūnyatāsatya*) someone may decide that there is no point making an effort on the spiritual path since from an ultimate point of view there is no such thing as morality, Buddhahood, *nirvāṇa* etc. when applied indendently of the lower), is defused. The exoteric *pratītyasamutpāda* is applied to demonstrate the mechanism of the Four Noble Truth doctrine. Whether it is entirely successful in this will be left to a later discussion, particularly in chapter seven, but we may safely say that the second and third truths are dealt with in this teaching. Thus the Arising of Suffering (*duḥkhasamudaya*) is shown to be a movement towards *saṃsāra* caused by ignorance (*avidyā*), whereas the Cessation of Suffering (*duḥkhanirodha*) is a movement backwards through the chain resulting in the extinction of ignorance (*avidyā*) by the application of *prajñā*. This in turn leads to a direct understanding of reality (*tattvajñāna*) which is *nirvāṇa*. This seems to be the sense of the *Śūnyatāsaptati*:

> By understanding the truth (*tattva*), ignorance (*avidyā*), which arises from the four perverted ideas (*viparyāsa*), does not exist. When this is no more, the *karma*-formations (*saṃskāra*) do not arise. The remaining (ten members) likewise.[54]
>
> To imagine (*klp-*) that things (*bhāva*) born by causes and conditions (*hetupratyaya*) are real (*samyak*) is called ignorance (*avidyā*) by the Teacher (*sāstṛ*). From that the twelve members (*dvādaśāṅga*) arise. But when one, by seeing correctly, has understood that things (*bhāva*) are empty (*śūnya*) one is not infatuated (*mūdha*). That is the cessation of ignorance (*avidyā-nirodha*). Thereupon the twelve members stop.[55]

It is interesting that this exoteric teaching is incapable of explaining the origin of suffering and its final end. When we turn to an examination of the esoteric teaching however this problem is cleared up. We are now dealing with a conception of *pratītyasamutpāda* which works as a metaphorical designation for reality uncontaminated by the working of *prap-*

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53 *op. cit.* p. 273.
54 *ŚS.* v. 62.
55 *ŚS.* v. 64–5.

añca. Now from our previous discussion we know that conceptions such as origin and end are merely the result of discriminative thought (*vikalpa*) working on the fundamental distinction between identity (*ekatva*) and difference (*anyatva*), which is the principal feature of *prapañca*. From the ultimate point of view however, *tattva*, and therefore *pratītyasamutpāda*, are free from *prapañca* (*prapañcopaśamaṃ*) and it is inappropriate at this level to speak of a beginning or an end to reality. This is traditional Buddhist doctrine which is reflected in the unexplicated points (*avyākṛta-vastu*) such as "Is the world eternal, not eternal, both eternal and not eternal, or neither eternal nor not eternal?"[56] It seems that, if we equate the exoteric teaching with the conventional level of truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), and the esoteric teaching with the ultimate level of truth (*paramārthasatya*), the use of limiting terms such as beginning and end are inappropriate for both. This is rather a conundrum and one begins to wonder whether Nāgārjuna's theory of the two truths can really effectively deal with traditional Buddhist teachings since we have already identified an area in which a fundamental set of ideas i.e. the First and Fourth Noble Truths, appear problematic.

To resolve such a problem the *Madhyamaka* posits the idea of different types of disciples. On the initial stages of the path a practitioner is treated to positivistic teachings.

> To begin with (a teacher) should say that everything exists to his truth-seeking (pupil). Later when he has understood the meaning he gains isolation (*viviktatā*) without being attached.[57]

Candrakīrti distinguishes three separate types of disciple; the lower type (*hīna-vineya*), the middling type (*madhya-vineya*) and the excellent type (*utkṛṣṭa-vineya*).[58] The lower type is given positive descriptions of reality in which terms such as self (*ātman*) apply and serve to turn such a disciple away from unwholesome actions. The middling type is taught in a negative manner. In this way notions such as non-self (*anātman*) free the practitioner from the speculative view that there is such a thing as a real substantial self (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*). The superior type of disciple is said to be able to penetrate the very kernel of the most profound teaching and in

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56 *A*. iv. 68f.

57 *YṢ*. v. 30
sarvam astīti vaktavyam ādau tattvagaveṣiṇaḥ
paścād avagatārthasya niḥsaṅgasya viviktatā
Tibetan:
de ñid tshol la thog mar ni
thams cad yod ces brjod par bya
don rnams rtogs śin chags med la
phyis ni rnam par dben pa'o

58 *Prasannapadā* 18.5–6, la Vallée Poussin (ed.) *op. cit.* p. 360–1.

consequence, having attained to the stage of zealous attachment (*adhimukti*) with respect to *nirvāṇa*, is taught in terms of neither ... nor type statements e.g. "there is neither a self nor a non-self". In other words, the Buddhist spiritual path appears, from the writings of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, to be a graded one, the development of *prajñā* leading to the understanding of reality (*tattvajñāna*) being a slow process.

Before turning to an examination of these doctrines as they are presented in *MMK* it may be worthwhile to ponder a curious fact. Most scholars agree that a distinctive feature of the *Madhyamaka* teaching is the two levels of truth doctrine. However in the subsidiary works of Nāgārjuna a distinction between the conventional (*saṃvṛt*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*) is hardly ever explicitly stated, though a generalised appeal to such notions is very often implicit in many statements. It is interesting that in one of the few verses I have been able to identify, in which the two truths are both mentioned, i.e. in the *Acintyastava* of the *Catuḥstava*, the formulation of the doctrine bears distinctly *Vijñānavāda*-like connotations. Thus:

> Convention (*saṃvṛti*) arises from causes and conditions and is relative (*paratantra*). Thus the relative has been spoken of (by You). The ultimate meaning, however is absolute (*akṛtrima*).[59]

The relative (*paratantra*) is the middle term in the three nature (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine of the *Vijñānavāda* and is very often identified with *pratītyasamutpāda*. For instance the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* gives nine essential meanings of *paratantrasvabhāva* (the relative nature). These are:

- (i) The base for the appearance of entities (*sarvadharmapratibhāṣāśraya*)
- (ii) Dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)
- (iii) Representation only (*vijñaptimātratā*)
- (iv) Neither different nor non-different (from the other two *svabhāvas*) (*na bhinno nāpy abhinnaḥ*)
- (v) Like magical illusion, etc. (*māyādivat*)
- (vi) Pertaining to suffering and cleansing (*samkleśāṃśiko vyavadānāṃśikaś ca*)
- (vii) The object apprendended by the knowledge realised in succession (to the wisdom) (*ālambanaṃ pṛṣṭhalabdhajñānasya*)
- (viii) *Nirvāṇa* without any fixed abode (*apratiṣṭhitanirvāṇa*)
- (ix) The Buddha's body constituting entities (*dharmakāya*).[60]

As a provisional measure, we may say that the two truths should not be considered ontologically but rather as epistemological orientations towards some undefined state which is given a number of epithets such as

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59 *CS*. III. 44
hetupratyayasambhūtā paratantrā ca saṃvṛtiḥ
paratantra iti proktaḥ paramārthas tv akṛtimaḥ

60 cf. Aramaki p. 954

pratītyasamutpāda. This state cannot be said to exist or not exist in the way that it is possible to say cars or unicorns exist, or not, as the case may be. Further, we must assume that both truths can only be efficacious within some, as yet, indeterminate mental framework, though at this stage it may be possible to suggest that the perception of the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) is in some sense tied up with the workings of *vijñāna*, while the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) involves *jñāna*.

Nāgārjuna's use of the term relative (*paratantra*) for *pratītyasamutpāda* allows us to speculate that there may be a great deal more of a connection between his two-fold truth formulation and the three nature notion of the *Vijñānavāda* than is generally recognised. This theme will be picked up and developed at a later stage in our argument.[61] However we must stay with Nāgārjuna himself a little longer to establish his position in the most prominent of his works.

61 cf. *infra.* ch. six.

CHAPTER TWO

NĀGĀRJUNA AND LOGIC

It will be our purpose in the following chapter to investigate the doctrines contained in Nāgārjuna's major works. We will examine the interpretation of some important scholars and attempt to show their various drawbacks. This will point the way to our own position with regard to his work, a position in which a specific solution with respect to *pratītyasamutpāda* becomes the key concept in the understanding of reality. *Pratītyasamutpāda* will be shown to be as positive a description of reality as is possible, given Nāgārjuna's, and the general Buddhist tradition's, stance on the role of language. It will provide the rationale for the appearance of the enlightened and the unenlightened states. However before this exegesis is possible let us examine the contemporary views on those texts which are indisputably claimed, by all, to be authentically written by Nāgārjuna himself.

It has been customary among scholars of the past to read Nāgārjuna with the aid of a commentary. Indeed since the *MMK* itself was abstracted in the first place, and in totality, from the commentary (*Prasannapadā*) of Candrakīrti,[1] it is hardly surprising that the views expressed in that commentary are strongly associated with the doctrines of the *MMK*. We are left then with a tradition of scholarship, initiated by Stcherbatsky, and in the present day represented by Murti, that attempts an exposition of Nāgārjuna's doctrines based on commentarial literature written approximately four centuries after the event. One would suppose, though here information is very sketchy, that after significant developments in the use of logic in religio-philosophical debate, and a general interchange of ideas, a somewhat modified world picture would have developed during this period. This view is certainly upheld by Kalupahana, in his recent translation of *MMK*,[2] who admits to having become rather uncomfortable with Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna upon hearing that contemporary Vedāntists hold Candrakīrti in high regard.[3] Nevertheless scholars like Murti retain their position. They claim that the *Mādhyamika*:

> ... uses only one weapon. By drawing out the implications of any view he shows its self contradictory character. The dialectic is a series of REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM arguments (*prasaṅgāpādanam*). Every thesis is turned against itself. The *Mādhyamika* is a *prāsangika* or *vaitandika*, a dialectician or free-lance debater.

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1 *Mūla Madhyamakākarikā de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā Commentaire de Candrakīrti* par L. de la Vallée Poussin (1903–1913) Bibliotheca Buddhica IV republished by Biblio Verlag, Osnabrück (1970).

2 Kalupahana (1986).

3 *ibid.* p. xiii.

> The *Mādhyamika* DISPROVES the opponent's thesis, and does *not* prove any thesis of his own.[4]

In fact, as we shall see in due course, not even Candrakīrti himself can realistically claim to simply turn an opponent's thesis upon itself and reduce it to absurd conclusions, without introducing positions that the opponent does not hold himself. More importantly he cannot disprove the opponent's thesis without proving a thesis of his own. When we turn to the case of Nāgārjuna we shall see that such a description of his method is impossible to uphold. Robinson[5] has attempted to demonstrate that in some instances, Nāgārjuna seems to be explicitly using at least two of the three traditional Western laws of thought as axiomatic to his system, though there is little evidence that this has been agreed by his opponent. Thus we have a number of explicit statements of the principle of contradiction in the *kārikās*:

> In truth, the cessation of a real existing entity is not possible. For indeed, it is not possible to have the nature of both existence and non-existence at the same time.[6]

or:

> A completed-incompleted doer cannot create a completed-incompleted deed. For how could the mutually conflicting completed and incompleted states co-exist as one?[7]

These statements would seem to mirror the purport of the third position of the *catuṣkoṭi*, or tetralemma, employed by the Buddhists, that a thing cannot be both existent and non-existent, and in this general sense the third *koṭi* appears to conform to the principle of contradiction. Now, although the law of identity is nowhere found in any of the works we have ascribed to Nāgārjuna, Robinson certainly believes that the law of the excluded middle is held. In support of his contention he cites:

> Indeed, a passing entity does not come to pass, and neither does a non-passing entity. Apart from these, how could there be a third (type of) entity coming to pass?[8]

and

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4 Murti (1960) p. 131.

5 Robinson (1957) p. 295.

6 *MMK.* vii. 30.
sataśca tāvabhāvasya nirodha nopapadyate
ekatve na hi bhāvaś ca nābhāvas copapadyate

7 *MMK.* viii. 7
kārakaḥ sadasadbhūtaḥ sadasatkurute na tat
parasparaviruddhaṃ hi saccāsaccaikataḥ kuṭaḥ

8 *MMK.* ii. 8
gantā na gacchati tāvadagantā naiva gacchati
anyo ganturagantuśca kastṛtīyo hi gacchati

> One who admits existence will necessarily perceive permanence and destruction. For, it necessarily follows that such an existence must either be permanent or impermanent.[9]

We may simply comment at this stage that statements such as these seem to support the view that a law of the excluded middle is invoked on occasions by Nāgārjuna. Robinson's conclusions, with regard to Nāgārjuna's putative adherence to such laws, are suitably vague. This is obviously advisable, particularly since at no point in his writings does Nāgārjuna exactly state the laws of thought as such. It has been suggested more than once that Indian thought forms need not precisely mirror those adopted in the West. Robinson seems to bear this in mind as he does not press Nāgārjuna's adherence to the laws very far, contending in his summing up merely that:

> Since Nāgārjuna's argument relies on numerous dichotomies, the principle of contradiction is necessary to most of his inferences.[10]

In another article Robinson[11] questions how far the view that Nāgārjuna adopted the *prasaṅga* method with his opponents can be upheld. He concludes that, in fact, it is possible to tease out a number of positions that are Nāgārjuna's alone. They do not belong to an identifiable opponent. Using such a method Robinson is able to show that six positive positions are axiomatically held solely by Nāgārjuna in his *MMK*. These are as follows.[12]

(i) Whatever has extension is divisible, hence is composite and is therefore neither permanent nor real. In consequence an indivisible, infinitesimal thing cannot possess extension. Now all the schools of Buddhism, together with the *Mahāyānasūtras*, do in fact accept a category of non-composite, non-conditioned things (*asaṃskṛtadharma*). For instance, in the *Sarvāstivāda*, space (*ākāśa*), as a dharma of this category, is considered to have infinite extension while at the same time being incapable of division. The *Acintyastava* of the *Catuḥstava* agrees with this definition since we are told:

> That which arises not, disappears not, is not to be annihilated and is not permanent, that is (*tattva*) which is like space (*ākāśa*) (and) not within the range of words (or) knowledge (*akṣarajñāna*).[13]

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9 *MMK*. xxi. 14
bhāvamabhyupapannasya śāśvatocchedadarśanaṃ
prasajyate sa bhāvo hi nitya 'nityo 'tha vā bhavet

10 *op. cit.* p.296.

11 Robinson (1968).

12 cf. *ibid.* p.4.

13 *CS*. III. 39.
yan nodeti na ca vyeti nocchedi na ca śāśvatam
tad ākāśapratīkāśaṃ nākṣarajñānagocaraṃ

It seems strange that, in *MMK* ch. 5, Nāgārjuna should concentrate his attack on the notion of space (*ākāśa*) by picking the relation between *ākāśa* and its characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) as a weak link, when it is clear that his opponents, by regarding *ākāśa* as *asaṃskṛta*, accept that it is devoid of attributes or characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*). If Nāgārjuna accepts his opponents' position, space would be "not within the range of words or knowledge (*akṣarajñāna*)", and consequently would not be a legitimate target for his argument.

(ii) To exist means to be arisen and consequently existence is synonymous with manifestation. There can be no unmanifested existence. This axiom seems to contradict the doctrines of other Buddhists who hold that the real is that which has never arisen, has no beginning, no end and is permanent. This seems to be the meaning of the *Udāna* where we are told:

> There is that sphere wherein is neither earth nor water nor fire nor air, wherein is neither the sphere of infinite space nor of infinite consciousness, nor of nothingness, nor of either ideation nor non-ideation; where there is neither this world nor a world beyond nor both together nor moon and sun; this I say is free from coming and going, from duration and decay; there is no beginning and no establishment, no result and no cause; this indeed is the end of suffering.[14]

In other places Nāgārjuna holds to such a position. Hence:

> Where the functional realm of the mind ceases, the realm of words also ceases. For indeed, the essence of existence (*dharmatā*) is like *nirvāṇa*, without origination and destruction.[15]

and such a view is echoed in the *maṅgalaśloka* of *MMK*. We may therefore conclude with Robinson that:

> Nāgārjuna is not alone among the thinkers of classical India in promiscuously adhering now to one and now to another of these (two) axioms.[16]

(iii) A real thing would have to be an utterly simple individual which contains no diversity. If it had diversity, it would have extension and so would not be indivisible and real. This is a corollary of axiom (i).

(iv) The perception of arising and ceasing is illusory. Nāgārjuna makes such a point in the *kārikās*:

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14 *U.* 80
Atthi bhikkhave tad āyatanam, yattha n'eva pathavī na āpo no tejo na vāyo na ākāsānañcāyatanaṃ na viññāṇānañcāyatanaṃ na ākiñcaññāyatanaṃ na nevasaññānāsaññāyatanaṃ n'āyam loko na paraloko ubho candimasūriyā, tad amhaṃ bhikkave n'eva āgatiṃ vadāmi na gatiṃ na ṭhitiṃ na cutiṃ na upapattiṃ appatiṭṭhaṃ appavattaṃ anārammanaṃ eva tam es' ev'anto dukkhassā'ti

15 *MMK.* xviii. 7
nivṛttam abhidhātavyam nivṛttaś cittagocaraḥ
anutpannāniruddhā hi nirvāṇam iva dharmatā

16 *op. cit.* p.5.

> You may think that both occurrence and dissolution can be perceived but such a perception only comes about from a deluded mind.[17]

Very often the perception of origination and duration are compared with a dream, an illusion or a city of the *gandharvas*

> Like an illusion, a dream or an illusory city in the sky. In such a way has origination, duration and cessation been described.[18]

Robinson shows that Nāgārjuna's attempt to demonstrate all phenomena as illusory (*māyā*) is not arrived at by a *prasaṅga* treatment of an opponent's position. Neither is it arrived at by resort to an empirical examination of perception which shows that the senses generate distorted information. On the contrary all that Nāgārjuna is doing here is dogmatically asserting that perception is always distorted by false thought constructions (*vikalpa, prapañca* etc.).

(v) Only transitive actions and relations are allowed. A good case in point is *MMK*. vii. 7–8:

> (opponent's contention) As light illuminates both itself and other entities, so does origination give rise both to itself and others.
> (Nāgārjuna's reply) There is no darkness in light or in its abode. What then does light illumine when, indeed, it destroys darkness?[19]

When Nāgārjuna denies that a lamp can illuminate itself, he is merely disallowing the making of reflexive statements. Nāgārjuna will claim that the statement "Light illuminates itself" is incoherent even though that same statement may be reformulated as "Light is inherently bright" which is perfectly coherent from a commonsense point of view. It seems that axiom five becomes a special case of axiom three where a real thing is defined as being utterly simple and hence without attributes. As we have already shown, axiom three is corollary of axiom one, and no one except Nāgārjuna takes this axiom seriously. One is left feeling that Nāgārjuna's method is on occasions specious to say the least.

(vi) It is claimed that the Buddhas teach:

> ... that the *dharma* is based on two truths; namely the relative (*saṃvṛti*) truth and the ultimate (*paramārtha*) truth.[20]

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17 *MMK*. xxi. 11
dṛśyate saṃbhavaś caiva vibhavaś caiva te bhavet
dṛśyate saṃbhavaś caiva mohād vibhava eva ca

18 *MMK*. vii. 34
yathā māyā yathā svapno gandharvanagaraṃ yathā
tathotpādas tathā sthānaṃ tathā bhaṅga udāhṛtaṃ

19 *MMK*. vii. 8–9
pradīpah svaparātmānau saṃprakāśayitā yathā
utpādah svaparātmānāv ubhāv utpādayet tathā
pradīpe nāndhakāro'sti yatra cāsau pratiṣṭhitaḥ
kiṃ prakāśayati dīpaḥ prakāśo hi tamovadhaḥ

However in chapter 24 of the *kārikās* Nāgārjuna's putative opponent is a *Hīnayānist* who argues that Nāgārjuna is denying the Buddha's teaching as contained in the *Tripiṭaka*. Nāgārjuna is not really in a position to invoke the Buddha's teaching on the two truths as contained in the *Mahāyānasūtras* since his antagonist will not accept such texts as authoritative.

We are now in a position to briefly summarise Nāgārjuna's method in the *kārikās*. As Robinson puts it:

> It consists (a) of reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy.[21]

This is most definitely not the *prasaṅga* method as defined by Murti. Other authors have noted the inconsistencies between the *reductio ad absurdum* method extolled by Candrakīrti and Nāgārjuna's own particular methodology. Lamotte is a major scholar who, in his introduction to a translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*, is prepared to put down a further six positions or theses which he considers are held in a positive sense by the early *Madhymaka* at least from the point of view of the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*). These are:

(i) All dharmas are without own-being (*niḥsvabhāva*), i.e. empty of self-being (*svabhāvaśūnya*).
(ii) All dharmas are non-produced (*anutpanna*) and non-destroyed (*aniruddha*).
(iii) All dharmas are originally quiet (*ādiśānta*) and by nature in complete *nirvāṇa* (*prakṛtiparinirvṛta*).
(iv) The dharmas are without a character (*alakṣaṇa*) and are consequently unutterable (*anirvacanīya, anabhilāpya*) and inconceivable (*acintya*).
(v) All dharmas are equal (*sama*) and non-dual (*advaya*).
(vi) Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is not an entity (*bhāva, dharma, padārtha*).

Although we may object to statement (vi), preferring to say that from the ultimate point of view *śūnyatā* neither exists (*asti*) nor does not exist (*nāsti*), nevertheless, here again, we have a respectable authority on *Mahāyāna* Buddhism admitting the fact that Nāgārjuna, far from following the *prasaṅga* method, is quite ready to hold a number of views which appear axiomatic for his own system though they are not held by any known opponent. The whole debate has been recently summarised with great clarity by Ruegg.[22] He holds that:

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20 *MMK.* xxiv. 8
21 *op. cit.* p. 8–9.
22 Ruegg (1986)

> What the *Mādhyamaka* has disowned, then, is any thesis, assertion or view (*dṛṣṭi*) that posits the existence of some kind of *bhāva* or *dharma* possessing a *svabhāva*, and not all philosophical statements, doctrines and theories (*darśana*) without distinction.[23]

While it is true that Nāgārjuna avoids all positive assertion of entities, one should not see him as someone single-mindedly intent on the rejection of all philsosophical and ethical thought. Rather:

> The *Madhyamaka* philsophy is... a non-speculative and non-constructive discourse relating to non-substantial factors (*dharma*) originating in the structured conditionship of *pratītyasamutpāda*.[24]

The pivotal point of the whole *Madhyamaka* system seems to be the term *śūnyatā*. Nāgārjuna's statement in *MMK*. xxiv. 11, that a wrongly grasped *śūnyatā* is like a badly seized snake appears to imply that an ontological existence value cannot easily be predicated of it. That it cannot be either an existent or a non-existent seems clear since the *Madhyamaka* would be guilty of the charge of eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*) if he endorsed the former position, and by condoning the second would be accused of nihilism (*ucchedavāda*). Since all Buddhist schools, and the *Mādhyamika* is no exception here, stress an avoidance of adopting any extreme position, and in consequence tread a Middle Path (*madhyama pratipad*), there is no difficulty in accepting an idea of *śūnyatā* which avoids these two extremes. P.J. Raju[25] makes an interesting point in his association of the term *śūnya* with the mathematical zero of Indian scientific thought. Zero is defined as a mathematically indeterminate number, being neither positive nor negative. This seems a reasonable interpretation and the only objection to Raju's position here is that of Ruegg, whose argument seems more a quibble than anything else, since as we shall see, he is wholeheartedly opposed to any attempt to place a value on the notion of *śūnyatā*. He says:

> ... there is no evidence in the basic texts of the *Madhyamaka* school that a mathematical model (and place-value) had any immediate bearing on their theory of *śūnyatā*. In the *Madhyamaka* the term *śūnya* refers to the fact that any *dharma* is empty of own being (*svabhāvaśūnya*) in which notion there is no mathematical connotation.[26]

It seems to me that Raju has not been attempting to expand the whole of the *Madhyamaka* philosophy using a mathematical model as Ruegg seems to suggest. He is simply saying that the concept of zero, as a term referring to an entity, or entities, which cannot be determined with regard to being or non-being, and which consequently have a problematic ontological

23 *ibid.* p. 233.

24 *ibid.* p. 235.

25 Raju, P.T. 'The Principle of Four-Cornered Negation in Indian Philosophy ', *Review of Metaphysics* 7 (1954) p. 694–713.

26 Ruegg (1977–8) p. 40 n. 154.

value, may quite feasibly have been borrowed from mathematics, because of its symbolic sense. Now *MMK.* xxiv. 13 holds that emptiness (*śūnyatā*) may not be an object of refutation. This stands to reason. Something may only be refuted or affirmed if it is capable of being understood in terms of being or non-being. *Śūnyatā* is clearly not capable of being understood in such a way, which is why it is reported to be like a snake wrongly grasped (*MMK.* xxiv. 11). One can easily fall into the trap of assigning a definite value to it. This is what Lamotte is saying in his thesis (vi), i.e. that *śūnyatā* is not an entity. It does not follow from this that *śūnyatā* does not exist. It is not in a null class, along with mirages, etc., as Nakamura[27] would have us believe.

Nagarjuna's statement that:

> Whatever is in correspondence with emptiness (*śūnyatā*) all is in correspondence (i.e. possible). Again whatever is not in correspondence with emptiness (*śūnyatā*), all is not in correspondence.[28]

shows how *śūnyatā* is to be properly interpreted. When things are not understood as being empty, substantiality or own-being (*svabhāva*) is imputed to them. Nāgārjuna shows in *MMK.* xv. that the concept of *svabhāva*, when imposed on things, renders them incapable of cooperating in dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). An ignorant world-view then destroys the essentially causal characteristic of things. Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the abandonment of such a world-view. One comes to see how things actually cooperate.

Robinson confirms our supposition, while at the same time repudiating the position of Nakamura:

> (All [*sarvam*]) means all mundane and transmundane *dharmas* (in *MMK.* xxiv. 14), that is all true predicables in the Buddhist domain of discourse. It manifestly does not mean predications about rabbit horns and tortoise hairs ... Dependent co-arising is emptiness and therefore it is cogent. Emptiness is by definition 'absence of own being' (*svabhāva*). The entire point of Nāgārjuna's argument is that the class of entities that possess own-being is null. Thus the class of empty phenomena (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is the complement of the own-being or null class ... Thus the emptiness class is not null, but is co-extensive with the universal class.[29]

Things are not totally non-existence but simply falsely imputed to have own-being (*svabhāva*). In fact these *dharmas* are *svabhāvaśūnya* and cannot be confused with any null class from a logical point of view. Actually,

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27 Nakamura, H. 'Buddhist Logic expounded by Means of Symbolic Logic' *J.I.B.St.* 7/1 (1958) p. 1–21. First published in Japanese 1954. cf. p. 14–15.

28 *MMK.* xxiv. 14.
sarvaṃ ca yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya yujyate
sarvaṃ na yujyate tasya śūnyaṃ yasya na yujyate

29 Robinson (1957) p. 306.

this second, non-null or universal class has cogency simply because it is linked to *pratītyasamutpāda*.

In another part of the *kārikās* we find that:

> Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) we call emptiness (*śūnyatā*). This is a provisional name and indeed it is the middle path.[30]

In other words *śūnyatā* is a provisional name or metaphorical designation (*upādāya prajñapti*) for dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). It has already been noted that the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* occupied an important place in Nāgārjuna' system. Now we can see why. *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* are synonymous. Whatever is in correspondence with these is ultimately true.

Nāgārjuna's method then is to show that any of the alternatives supplied by discursive thought to characterise things, may be conventionally valid, but from the ultimate point of view they do not apply. In presenting the conventional options he clearly, as Ruegg suggests, uses a logical method based on Aristotelean "two-valued logic founded on the dichotomously structured binary nature of discursive thinking in terms of alternatives".[31] Or again:

> ... the exclusion of the middle, as an onto-logical principle ... is ... one of the very foundations of *Madhyamaka* thought. And if the logical principle of excluded middle ... is not accepted in the *Mādhyamika's* procedure based on the use of the *prasaṅga*, this is because he considers that the subject of such sentences is in fact null.[32]

However, since he rejects all alternatives from the ultimate point of view, one will be wary in applying Western logical concepts to interpret his system *in toto*. Ruegg again sums this up by stating:

> That the principle involved in the *TERTIUM NON DATUR* is indeed fundamental in *Mādhyamika* thought follows from the consideration that, if a third position or value really existed, the mind would cling to it as some kind of thing, albeit one beyond the two values of "classical" logic. But if this were to happen there could be no "stillness" or "tranquility" on the level of *parāmartha*, i.e. no absence of *vikalpa* and *prapañca*. And this would be radically opposed to *Madhyamaka* theory.[33]

We can give a qualified support for such a view, the qualification being that at the level of *paramārtha*, i.e. that state devoid of thought construction (*nirvikalpajñāna*), "stillness" does not imply the complete obliteration of mental processes. As we have seen *vijñāna* is transformed into *jñāna*,

30 *MMK*. xxiv. 18
yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe
sā prajñaptirupādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā

31 *op. cit.* p.51

32 *ibid.* p. 50

33 *ibid.* p. 49

and the *jñāna* of a Buddha has an object. This object paradoxically has no objectivity since at such a level of spiritual attainment objectivity and subjectivity have been transcended.

Of importance in connection with Nāgārjuna's method is the question of where in his writings the two-valued logic, which he generally employs, breaks down. It seems, from what has already been observed, that it would most probably do so when discussion turns away from the conventional and towards the ultimate nature of things. Now we know that a *prāsaṅgika* is supposed to avoid the characterisation of things from the ultimate point of view, but is this actually the case in the writings of Nāgārjuna? Ruegg certainly believes that it is:

> ... there appears to be no doubt that Nāgārjuna, and his successors in the *Madhyamaka* school, founded many of their analyses of concepts and entities and their arguments based on reasoning by undesired consequences (*prasaṅga*) on the twin principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle, before going on to show that in fact none of the members of a conceptual pair or tetralemma can in fact apply in reality.[34]

Staal[35] disagrees. In his examination of the logical structure of the *catuskoṭi* he allows an interpretation of the fourth *koti* in which adherence to the law of the excluded middle is rejected:

> When the *Mādhyamika* philosopher negates a proposition, it does not follow that he himself accepts the negation of that proposition. Accordingly, there are other alternatives than A and not-A, and the principle of the excluded middle does not hold.[36]

The point at issue here seems to be the aspect of Nāgārjuna's doctrine which most disturbs his opponents. We will agree with Fenner's characterisation of Nāgārjuna's overall approach to the conventional world such that:

> The assumptions that undergird the *Mādhyamika* analysis are these (1) that conceptuality depends on the *consistent* ascription of predicates to an entity, (2) that predicates arise in the context of their logical opposites, which in its strong interpretation, as is required by the *Mādhyamikas*, means that the presence of predicate implies its absence (and *vice versa*). This principle assumes a status equal to the aristotelean principles and its significance is that analysis is effective to the extent that this principle is structurally formative (in its strong interpretation) for conceptuality. (3) the logical validity and formative influence and role of the three aristotelean principles of thought in structuring the development of conceptuality.[37]

34 *ibid.* p. 50

35 Staal, J.F. 'Negation and the Law of Contradiction in Indian Thought' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25 (1962) p. 52–71. and Staal, J.F. *Exploring Mysticism* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975.

36 *ibid.* p. 44

37 Fenner, P. 'A Study of the Relationship between Analysis (*vicāra*) and Insight

However by totally negating the predicates which arise in the context of their logical opposites, is Nāgārjuna not opening himself to the charge of nihilism by appearing to suggest that such predicates in fact refer to nothing at all? All Buddhists, including Nāgārjuna, are quick to reject the charge of nihilism. In fact the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* was written specifically with such a purpose in mind. Ruegg himself conducts such a defense when he comments:

> ... a thing may be said, following *Mahāyānist* theory to be like a magical projection (*māyā*) (not in a nihilistic sense but in the sense that it is imagined to be otherwise than it is in its true nature of dependent origination and emptiness).[38]

If this is so Nāgārjuna must surely wish to negate the predicates without at the same time negating the ground to which they have been incorrectly applied. This may be the purport of Staal's aforementioned statement.

Let us now turn to an associated problem. Of central importance in our study of Nāgārjuna's thought is the specific form of negation he employs. The Buddhist tradition accepts two alternative forms of negation and we are now in the position to examine which of the two is most appropriate to Nāgārjuna's work, acknowledging beforehand that nowhere in those texts ascribed to him does he explicitly make the distinction himself. The two forms of negation of interest are the total negation (*prasajyapratiṣedha*) and the limited or partial negation (*paryudāsapratiṣedha*). Put briefly the *prasajyapratiṣedha* is a total negation because it negates a thesis without at the same time affirming any contrapositive thesis. In other words the total negation signifies the total avoidance of any thesis formulation whatsoever. The *paryudāsapratiṣedha* or parital negation however is one in which, although an original thesis may be refuted, there is no implication that the contrapositive thesis is also negated. As Kajiyama[39] describes it the *prasajya* type negation is primarily negative as in the case of the sentence, "they do not look at the sun". Here there is no suggestion that they are looking at anything else. On the other hand a *paryudāsapratiṣedha* may contain the suggestion of an affirmation. A good example here is the sentence, "He is a non-brahmin". One naturally assumes from this that he has some other caste status.

Reference to a typical neither ... nor (i.e. fourth *koṭi*) statement from the *kārikās* will establish what is meant. In *MMK*. xxv. 10 we have:

> The teacher (Buddha) has taught the abandonment of the concepts of being and non-being. Therefore *nirvāṇa* is properly neither (in the realm) of existence nor non-existence.[40]

(*prajñā*) based on the *Madhyamakāvatāra' J.I.P.* 12 (1984) p. 139–197 cf. p. 164.

38 *op. cit.* p. 51.

39 Kajiyama, Y. *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy. An Annotated translation of the Tarkabhāṣā of Mokṣākaragupta* Kyoto, 1966. p. 38–9.

40 *MMK.* xxv. 10

Now if we take this statement to be a *prasajya* type of negation then we are led to conclude that the twin ideas of being and non-being totally exhaust the ontological status of the concept which in this case is *nirvāṇa*. In the *prasajya* negation of *nirvāṇa* no further position can arise once the negation is concluded, which would lead to any proposition being tendered concerning the status of *nirvāṇa*. The *paryudāsa* or limited negation, works in a different way. The initial negation here does not exhaust all that may be held concerning the concept to be negated. In our example one would, on the surface, accept the idea that *nirvāṇa* is neither being nor non-being. Nevertheless one would not wish to state that these two positions exhaust the modes in which *nirvāṇa* may be said to occur. On the contrary *nirvāṇa* as we have already noted, is empty (*śūnya*) rather than totally devoid of existence, as Fenner makes clear:

> ... an entity is shown to be empty rather than non-existent through the exclusion of *all* possible predicates as being inapplicable to an entity. The entity A is neither a P nor a -P where P and not P exhaust the universal set of modalities. The nihilistic conclusion for the non-existence of something presupposes the applicability of predicates to an entity which are in actuality absent ... If A goes uncharacterised because all predicates are inapplicable to it, its existence or non-existence is unascertainable as the entity itself would be unidentifiable.[41]

If we make A=*nirvāṇa*, the total negation will indicate that P and –P completely exhaust all the modes in which A can be said to occur. This would not however be the case for Nāgārjuna since in his writings he implicitly holds the view that, while A "goes uncharacterised because all predicates are inapplicable to it", there is some indeterminate sense in which A may be said to exist. A useful way of indicating such indeterminacy will be to say that A exists ultimately in its emptiness (*śūnyatā*) mode. This will be the equivalent of saying that is ultimately uncontaminated by all attempts to define it existentially. This is what I mean when I talk about the ontologically indeterminate existence of an entity.

Most scholars who have treated this subject are heavily in debt to Candrakīrti. Because he insists on the *prasajya* type of negation as the characteristic negation of the *Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika* it has been taken for granted that Nāgārjuna himself, even though he makes no specific reference to either, avoided the use of the limited *paryudāsa* type. There is, in fact, a diversity of thought amongst more recent scholars on this particular issue. Fenner[42] tells us that Candrakīrti distinguishes his school from the *Svātantrika* school of Bhāvaviveka on the basis that while Bhāvaviveka and his followers adopt the *paryudāsa*, the *Prāsaṅgikas* plump for

prahāṇaṃ cābravīc chāsta bhavasya vibhavasya ca
tasmān na bhāvo nābhāvo nirvāṇaṃ iti yujyate

41 *op. cit.* p. 187

42 *ibid.* p. 188.

the *prasajya*. However, he fails to tell us precisely where Candrikīrti says this. Ruegg is similarly vague and does not quote sources. Nevertheless he opts for a different interpretation. For him both the *Prāsaṅgikas* and the *Svātantrikas* use only the *prasajya* negation. He claims that:

> In this form of negation (i.e. *prasajya*) as used by the *Mādhyamika* denial of a position does not necessarily involve commitment to any other position ... The *Mādhyamika* is certainly not working towards tome ontolgical or logical third value between contradictories any more than he is seeking a dialectical synthesis. Indeed, if there really existed such a dialectical synthesis or third value, there would be something on which conceptual thinking could base itself and cling, and the whole purpose of the *Madhyamaka* method could then no longer be achieved.[43]

Although this statement may be said, with some reservations, to outline the position of an author such as Candrakīrti there does not seem to be any good justification to extend it to include Nāgārjuna and his earlier followers. Let us take as an example the eight (negated) epithets of *pratītyasamutpāda* in the *maṅgalaśloka* of *MMK*

> *anirodhaṃ anutpādaṃ anucchedaṃ aśāśvataṃ*
> *anekārthaṃ anānārthaṃ anāgamaṃ anirgamaṃ*

Ruegg asks the question, do these epithets commit the *Mādhyamika* to a positive view concerning *pratītyasamutpāda* equivalent to the opposite of what is here negated? He answers "no". However from what has already been said concerning the status of *pratītyasamutpāda* in Nāgārjuna's non-*MMK* works, and his general method which only follows logical principles up to the limit of the conventional, we must be more careful than to give such an unqualified "no". Now Ruegg is completely consistent here. He applies the total (*prasajya*) negation in the manner that he expects Nāgārjuna would have done. Ultimately of course *pratītyasamutpāda* cannot be characterised and Ruegg is, in this sense, correct to say "no". However this is only half of the truth for we have already seen that an entity may also exist in its emptiness mode even though an attempt at predication has failed. In other words it may exist in a state of ontological indeterminacy. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is exactly the type of thing we should expect to possess such indeterminacy. Being ontologically indeterminate *pratītyasamutpāda* will survive the partial (*paryudāsa*) negation, and this is the point that Ruegg's "no" does not take into account. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is not non-existent. From the point of view of ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) it may not be presented as an object to consciousness. It is not the object of mundane consciousness (*vijñāna*), though it may be conceived, in a transcendent emptiness mode, as self and other intimately united in *gnosis* (*jñāna*). In other words there is such a thing as *pratītyasamutpāda*,

43 *op. cit.* p.4

though it may not be characterised in terms of the eight epithets mentioned. It may be said to be ontologically indeterminate.

At another point in *MMK* we hear that the Buddha may not be determined with regard to existence or non-existence after having attained *nirvāṇa*, and having died. This of course corresponds with the general unwillingness of the Buddha to ascribe an existence value to such a state in the unanswered questions of the *Tripiṭaka*. Nāgārjuna simply expands on what the Buddha has already said:

> That image of *nirvāṇa* (in which) the Buddha either "is" or "is not"—by him who (so imagines *nirvāṇa*) the notion is crudely grasped. Concerning that which is empty by its own-nature (*svabhāva*), the thoughts do not arise that: the Buddha "exists" or "does not exist" after death.[44]

However he makes it perfectly clear that the Buddha, in his ultimate condition, does have an ontological value for:

> Those who describe the Buddha in detail, who is unchanging and beyond all detailed description—Those, completely defeated by description, do not perceive the *Tathāgata*. The self-existence of the *Tathāgata* is the self-existence of the world. The *Tathāgata* is devoid of self-existence and the world is likewise.[45]

It would be much easier for Nāgārjuna, should he have so desired, to assert that neither the Buddha, nor the world exist, but this he pointedly refuses to do. We must assume that this is not the position he wishes to adopt. Such a position would, as far as our researches lead us to believe, be the consequence of a total negation (*prasajyapratiṣedha*) of the predicates. The position here taken with regard to the Buddha, since it assigns some indeterminate ontological value to his ultimate existence, corresponds closely with the consequences of a partial negation (*paryudāsapratiṣedha*).

Now, before turning to a textual analysis of *MMK*, let us briefly look at some of the logical aspects of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*VV*). Our point here will be to decide whether, in this text, Nāgārjuna applies the *prasaṅga* approach prescribed by Candrakīrti. In other words, does he formulate propositions not held by his opponents, and utilise a logic at odds in many places from that adopted by the so-called *prasaṅga* method. In the first place the precise nature of his opponent in this text is an object of

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44 *MMK*. xxii. 13–14
Yena grāho gṛhītastu ghano 'stīti tathāgataḥ
nāstīti sa vikalpayan nirvṛtasyāpi kalpayet
svabhāvataś ca śūnye 'smiṃś cintā naivopapadyate
paraṃ nirodhād bhavati buddho na bhavatīti vā

45 *MMK*. xxii. 15–16
Prapañcayanti ye buddhaṃ prapañcātītaṃ avyayaṃ
te prapañcahatāḥ sarve na paśyanti tathāgataṃ
tathāgato yat svabhāvas tat svabhāvam idaṃ jagat
tathāgato niḥsvābhavo niḥsvabhāvam idaṃ jagat

controversy. Bhattacharya[46] is of the opinion that Nāgārjuna's opponent is a *Naiyāyika* realist and in this he has his supporters, such as Tucci.[47] Lindtner[48] feels that this is incorrect. He gives five reasons to support his contention that the opponent is actually a Buddhist *Abhidhārmika*. Unfortunately at the present state of Buddhist studies the problem seems likely to be unsolved for sometime. However, if we do accept the opponent of *MMK* to be an *Abhidhārmika*, and that *MMK* and *VV* comprise a corpus with one specific end in view, then one has some reason to come down in favour of holding the opponent in *VV* to be from an *Abhidharmic* school.

Now commenting on the function of the *VV* in the *Madhyamaka* scheme of things Ruegg tells us that in this text

> ... a *Mādhyamika* restricts himself to a kind of philosophical destruction—and therapeutic dehabituation—with respect to dichotomising conceptualisation while refraining from propounding any propositional thesis (*pratijñā*) of his own, but any argument adduced to combat and refute the theory of *śūnyatā* is devoid of cogency, and falls into line with and reinforces the *Madhyamaka* theory, since all things can be shown to be equally non-substantial.[49]

This is simply not true for Nāgārjuna never successfully answers his opponent's first objection. However, even if it is admitted that there is some substance to his replies it can hardly be held, as Ruegg would have us believe, that he is using the *prasaṅga* method.

Let us examine the argument in detail. The opponent has spotted a weakness in Nāgārjuna's thought since if all is empty, then on what conceivable grounds can Nāgārjuna propound, in a meaningful way, the emptiness of all views. Thus the *VV* opens:

> If own being (*svabhāva*) does not exist anywhere in any existing thing, your statement (itself) being without own being is not capable of refuting own-being. But if that statement has (its own) own-being, then your initial proposition is refuted. There is a (logical) inconsistency here and you should explain the grounds of the difference.[50]

To what seems a justifiable complaint, Nāgārjuna replies that either his opponent accepts that negation must always have something real as its *negandum*, in which case he must accept emptiness (*śūnyatā*), or he must

46 Bhattacharya, K. *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna (Vigrahavyāvartanī)* Dehli (1978) p. 38 n 2

47 Tucci, G. *Pre-Diṅnāga Buddhist Texts on Logic from Chinese Sources* Baroda (1929) p. xxvii

48 *Nāgārjuniana* (1982) p. 71 n. 110

49 Ruegg *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School* p. 22

50 *VV*. 1–2
sarveṣāṃ bhāvānāṃ sarvatra na vidyate svabhāvaś cet
tvadvacanam asvabhāvaṃ na nivartayituṃ svabhāvaṃ alam
atha sasvabhāvaṃ etad vākyam pūrvā hatā pratijñā te
vaiṣamikatvaṃ tasmin viśeṣahetuś ca vaktavyaḥ

give up his thesis. This is confusing but, as far as Nāgārjuna's position is concerned there is no negating anything, otherwise one would be forced to accept the *neganda*. All he claims to be attempting to do is to suggest or indicate (*jñāpayate*) the absence of own being.[51] In his reply, Nāgārjuna makes a distinction between indicating an absence of own being and negating the existence of own being. These two activities are claimed to be completely different, and Nāgārjuna claims to be doing the former and not the latter. In the accompanying auto-commentary (*svopajñāvṛtti*) verse 64 is glossed.

> In the same manner, the sentence, there is no *svabhāva* of the *bhāvas*, does not make the *svabhāva* without essence, but conveys the absence of *svabhāva* in the *bhāvas*.[52]

Mehta[53] uses an analogy to elucidate this point in his interpretation of the argument. He says that when one makes a statement such as "Devadatta is not in the house", the statement itself merely informs us of Devadatta's absence in the house and does not possess the power to bring about the existence or non-existence of Devadatta as such. However the statement about Devadatta is really in no way analogous to the argument in *VV*. The statement concerning Devadatta is easily verifiable by sense perception and may be proved or disproved by a state of affairs beyond the structure of the sentence. Nāgārjuna's contention that the statement "All things are without own-being" simply serves to make such a fact known may not be verified in the same manner. It seems that it is Nāgārjuna who misses the point here. Since none of his contemporaries held a view that statements themselves have the power to bring about a state of affairs, i.e. emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Nāgārjuna abandons any claim to be a *Prāsaṅgika*. It seems that

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51 *VV*. 61–67
sata eva pratiṣedho yadi śūnyatvaṃ nanu pratisiddhaṃ idaṃ
pratiṣedhayate hi bhavān bhāvānām niḥsvabhāvatvaṃ
pratiṣedhayase 'tha tvam śūnyatvaṃ tac ca nāsti śūnyatvam
pratiṣedhaḥ sata iti te nanveṣa vihīyate vādaḥ
pratiṣedhayāmi nāham kiṃcit pratisedhyam asti na ca kiṃcit
tasmāt pratiṣedhayasīty adhilaya eṣa tvayā kriyate
yac cāharte vacanād asataḥ pratiṣedhavacanasiddhir iti
atra jñāpayate vāg asad iti tan na pratinihanti
mṛgatṛṣādṛṣṭānte yaḥ punar uktas tvayā mahāṃś carcaḥ
tatrāpi nirṇayam śṛṇu yathā sa dṛṣṭānta upapannah
sa yadi svabhāvataḥ syād grāho na syāt pratītya saṃbhūtaḥ
yaś ca pratītya bhavati grāho nanu śūnyatā saiva
yadi ca svabhāvataḥ syād grāhaḥ kas tam nivartayed grāhaṃ
śeṣeṣv apy eṣa vidhis tasmād eso 'nupālambhaḥ

52 *tadva nāsti svabhāva bhāvānām ity etad vacanam na bhāvānām nihsvabhāvatvaṃ karoti kiṃtu sarvabhaveṣu svabhāvasyābhāvaṃ jñāpayati*

53 Mehta, M. 'Śūnyatā and Dharmatā: The Mādhyamika View of Inner Reality' in Amore (1979) p. 30 n. 18.

he is putting forward this view himself. The opponent is therefore not objecting to this particular thesis but to the logical form of Nāgārjuna's central theme. In other words "If all things are empty, how can you demonstrate, given the fact that your own words are empty, emptiness?" The logical structure of a sentence such as "Devadatta is not in the house" is simply an inadequate analogy to the *Madhyamaka* contention that:

> ... *śūnyatā* does not have the function of making *dharmas* empty since this is what they are; a sentence concerning *śūnyatā* therefore serves to make this fact known.[54]

All sentences must presumably serve to make something known, otherwise one would be left with an absurd theory of language. Here then we have evidence of Nāgārjuna's technique at work. He does not attempt to answer the objection, but rather sidesteps it, proposes a theory that his opponent does not hold, which has the effect of introducing confusion, and finally introduces a conclusion which, because of the foregoing argument, seems acceptable when viewed not too critically. It is simply not the case that by a remorseless application of logic based on *reductio ad absurdum* of the opponent's thesis, Nāgārjuna achieves a crushing victory, and it is certainly not the case, as Ruegg[55] would have us believe that the *Madhyamaka* theory is immune from refutation. One cannot help but agree with Streng here when he says that Nāgārjuna's work occasionally is "an analysis which appears to be rather arid and often simply a play on words".[56] With reference to this particular argument in *VV* Betty has recently observed:

> It is as if the objector had said to Nāgārjuna, "Your're wrong", and Nāgārjuna had answered "Of course I'm wrong, that's precisely what makes me right". As alluring, as stunning, as Taoistically fascinating as such an answer is, it is not really an answer; it is not cogent in an argument where the rules of logic apply, as they do here. Nāgārjuna has evaded the issue; he has seen the problem, but he has not treated it seriously: he has not "accepted" it.[57]

Another apparent inconsistency arises in connection with *VV*. 29 which says:

> If I would make any proposition whatever, then by that I would have a logical error; but I do not make a proposition; therefore I am not in error.[58]

The autocommentary goes on to say:

> ... when all entities are empty, altogether still and devoid of a nature how could there be a proposition (presenting them as being something or other)?[59]

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54 Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 22
55 *ibid.* p. 23
56 Streng (1967) p. 181–182.
57 Betty (1983) p. 128.
58 *VV. 29*
yadi kā cana pratijñā syān me tata eṣa me bhaved doṣaḥ
nāsti ca mama pratijña tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ

The objection must be raised, that here again Nāgārjuna is up to something fishy. Is it not true that the statement "... I do not make a proposition", is itself a proposition (*pratijñā*)? Since it is, how is this compatible with the autocommentary in which we are told that there are no such things as propositions. The problem from the logical point of view, here is quite analogous to our examination of statements concerning *śūnyatā*, above. However, in this case Nāgārjuna does not attempt to follow up the problems. Ruegg attempts to dispense with them by saying

> ... this interpretation assimilates two distinct uses of the term "proposition", and it would hold good only if *pratijñā* meant here any sentence or statement ... But this sentence (i.e. *nāsti ca māma pratijñā VV*.29) is not a *pratijñā* in Nāgārjuna's sense; for in his way *pratijñā* denotes an assertion and more specifically a thesis which seeks to establish something.[60]

So according to Ruegg the term (i.e. *pratijñā*) may have one of two meanings. Firstly it may mean any sentence. Secondly it may mean a thesis which seeks to establish something. If we accept Ruegg's belief (unsupported by reference to sources) that all that Nāgārjuna is saying in *VV*. 29 is that he does not make propositions which seek to establish something, we are still back to square one and Ruegg has done nothing to extricate himself and Nāgārjuna from the problem. The objection still exists, "Is not your statement, that you do not make propositions seeking to establish theses, itself a proposition?"

VV is actually full of such inconsistencies and in the light of what we have said regarding both it and *MMK*, we must be forced into a different interpretation of these two works than that provided by Ruegg and others. There can be little doubt that Nāgārjuna does not abide by the *prasaṅga* method in argumentation. If he was a *Prāsaṅgika* we could accept that he has no thesis of his own to put forward, but this is simply not the case. Once we are able to bring in to question this putative connection with *prasaṅga* logic there will be no obstacle in our way to accepting Nāgārjuna's adherence to partial (*paryudāsa*) as opposed to total (*prasajya*) negation (*patiṣedha*). This interpretation is certainly consistent with the texts themselves.

Using these conclusions as our foundation we shall be able to pursue the thesis that the *Madhyamaka* is not as dissimilar to the *Yogācāra* as is generally thought. Since we now understand that Nāgārjuna, particularly in his apparent use of a three valued logic, may be implicitly able to hold "positive" positions concerning the nature of things, the idea that only the *Yogācāra* adopted such an outlook seems onesided.[61] It should now be possible to examine more parallels between the two "schools", particularly

59 *sarvabhāveṣu śūnyeṣv atyantopaśānteṣu prakṛtiviviktesu kutaḥ pratijñā*

60 Ruegg (1977–78) p. 49

61 Conze's point of view. This will be treated in more detail in chapters 6 and 8 *supra*.

when they are treated against the background of the early Buddhist tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

NĀGĀRJUNA AND THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITION

A. K. Warder[1] has attempted to ascertain the exact nature of the *Mahāyāna* teachings, if any contained, in *MMK*. I concur with his opinion, that any approach to Nāgārjuna via later commentators such as Candrakīrti should be dealt with carefully, since it is unlikely that any school of thought would stay still for a period of 400 years or so. Turning to the text then, Warder notes that throughout the whole of *MMK* there is no explicit quotation from any known *Mahāyānasūtra*. However, and this is surprising given the fact that Nāgārjuna is generally considered to be the *Mahāyānist* par excellence, quotations from the *Tripiṭaka* of the early schools are fairly frequent. Ruegg vigorously opposes Warder's thesis that there is no good reason to refer to the author of *MMK* as a *Mahāyānist* simply because he attacks certain ideas held by contemporary *Abhidhārmikas*. Ruegg in fact unearths a verse of *MMK* which he claims "clearly to presuppose a section of the *Ratnakūṭa* collection, the *Kāśyapaparivarta*".[2] This particular verse,

> Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is proclaimed by the victorious ones as the refutation of all viewpoints; but those who hold emptiness as a viewpoint—(the true perceivers) have called those incurable (*asādhya*).[3]

however, is not found intact in the *Ratnakuṭa*. The general idea is merely developed in this text. Since one could in all probability ascribe similarities in doctrine between verses of *MMK* and all sorts of disparate literatures, without at the same time being able to bring parallel texts forward as evidence, the contention that Nāgārjuna is a *Mahāyānist* since he quotes *Mahāyānasūtras* cannot be upheld. However Ruegg is definite that:

> ... in view of his place in the history of Buddhist thought and because of his development of the theory of non-substantiality and emptiness of all *dharmas*, it seems only natural to regard Nāgārjuna as one of the first and most important systematisers of *Mahāyānist* thought.[4]

Ruegg defends his position at another point by noting that, while the *MMK* may be problematic in its relationship to the *Mahāyānasūtras,* this is not the case with the *Ratnāvalī* which quotes at length from a number of *Mahāyāna* sources. However as explained in detail earlier on, the *Ratnāvalī* does not form part of the logical (*yukti*) corpus of Nāgārjuna's work as acknowledged by Tibetan and Chinese tradition and we must regard the

1 Warder in Sprung (ed.) (1973).
2 Ruegg (1981) p. 6.
3 *MMK* xiii. 8
śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnām proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ
yeṣām tu śūnyatādṛṣṭistānasādhyān babhāṣire.
4 Ruegg *op. cit.* p.7.

authorship of this text as not fully established, although one clearly respects tradition on this matter. It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that the first chapter of *Ratnāvalī* appears to contain "several allusions to the ancient *sūtras*."[5]

Other scholars have found parallels between *MMK* and *Mahāyānasūtras*, the most noteworthy of these being Lindtner.[6] He believes he has found three allusions to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* (*Laṅka*) in *MMK*. These are:

(i) *MMK* xviii. 7
nivṛttam abhidhātavyaṃ nivṛtte cittagocare
anutpannāniruddha hi nirvāṇam iva dharmatā
Laṅka. III. 9
astināstīty ubhāvantau yāvac cittasya gocaraḥ
gocareṇa nirudhena samyak cittaṃ nirudhyate

(ii) *MMK* xxi. 11
dṛśyate saṃbhavaś caiva vibhavaś caiva te bhavet
dṛśyate sambhavaś caiva mohād vibhava eva ca
Laṅka. X. 37
saṃbhavaṃ vibhavaṃ caiva mohāt paśyanti bāliśāḥ
na saṃbhavaṃ navibhavaṃ prajñāyukto vipaśyati

(iii) *MMK*. xvii. 33
kleśāh karmāṇi dehāś ca kartāraś ca phalāni ca
gandharvanagarākāra marīcisvapnasaṃnibhāḥ
Laṅka. X. 279
kleśāh karmapathā dehaḥ kartāras ca phalaṃ ca vai
marīcisvapnasaṃkāśā gandharvanagaropamā

While it is sufficiently clear that neither of these three pairs constitute parallel readings, Lindtner feels that, not only are the ideas presented in them identical, but the verses of *MMK* are themselves references to the *Lankāvatārasūtra*. This is something of an overstatement. P. Williams[7] has shown that this position cannot be upheld. In the case of example (i), while both verses do refer to the cessation of the wandering about of the mind (*cittagocara*), *MMK* goes on to talk of the cessation of that which can be talked about (*nivṛttam abhidhātavyam*) and concludes on a positive note. In other words we are told that *nirvāṇa* coincides with the true nature of things (*dharmatā*). The *Laṅka* reading is quite different, simply saying that when *cittagocara* is brought to an end then so too is the mind (*citta*). This is certainly not implied in *MMK*.

Let us look at the second example. Although both verses do refer to production and destruction as apprehended in delusion (*moha*), the *Laṇka*

5 Lindtner (1982) *Nagarjuniana* p. 163.
6 *op. cit.* p. 122 n. 149.
7 Williams (1984) p. 90ff.

quotation contrasts such a viewpoint with that of one united with *prajñā* (*prajñāyukta*). *MMK* does not. Therefore while *Laṅka* is comparing the vision of the enlightened with the unenlightened, *MMK* is more likely than not arguing with the commonly held *Abhidhārmika* concepts of origination and destruction. Example (iii) shows the most thoroughgoing overlap. However the comparison of conventional existents such as bodies (*dehāḥ*) with the city of the *gandharvas*, a mirage or a dream is a stock image from a certain phase of Buddhist writing. This being the case Nāgārjuna may have been referring to any of a large number of texts. Certainly Lindtner does not believe that Nāgārjuna's use of the *gandharvanagara* metaphor is itself sufficient reason to refute Warder's claim that the author of *MMK* cannot be demonstrated to be a *Mahāyānist*. It may be true that the term *gandarvanagara* does not occur in the ancient *āgamas*.[8] Nevertheless there are many occasions on which Lindtner draws our attention to Nāgārjuna's quotation from *Mahāyānasūtras* in his authentic works. Not only that, but in the *Acintyastava* we have mention of the *Mahāyāna* by name,[9] closely followed by another reference to cities of *gandharvas*.[10] Before returning to Warder though, let us merely endorse Williams' statement that although the verses quoted may "express similar sentiments ... there is no need to assume that the ... connection ... is a reference by Nāgārjuna to *Laṅka*".[11]

The texts that are definitely referred to in *MMK* are mainly from the *Saṃyuttanikāya* of the early *Tripiṭaka*. The only *sūtra* actually named is in *MMK*. xv. 7. This is the *Kātyāyanāvāda*[12] which tells us that the Buddha, throughout his teaching, always avoided the extremes of being (*asti*) and non-being (*nāsti*). Other *sūtras* are nevertheless agreed, by most scholars, to be referred to in *MMK*. Thus the *Acelakāśyapa*,[13] which incidentally follows immediately on from the *Kātyāyanāvāda* in the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, is quoted in *MMK*. xii. 1. It appears that this *sūtra* may be the source of Nāgārjuna's use of the *catuṣkoṭi* since we are told in it that suffering (*duḥkha*) does not come about either through self-causation (*svayaṃ kṛtaṃ*), causation by another (*parakṛtam*), by the two together, or by

8 *op. cit.* p. 21 n 67.

9 *Acintyastava* 2
yathā tvayā mahāyāne dharmanairātmyaṃ atmanā
viditaṃ deśitaṃ tadvad dhīmadbhyaḥ karuṇāvaśāt
cf. Lindtner *op. cit.* p. 140.

10 *Acintyastava* 5.

11 *op. cit.* p. 91–92.

12 Pali *S.* ii. 17ff
Sanskrit: *Tripathi* 167ff
Chinese: *Taisho* (99) Section 12, No. 19.

13 Pali *S.* ii. 19ff
Sanskrit: *Tripāthi* 172ff
Chinese: *Taisho* (99) Section 12, No 20.

neither. In fact suffering is said to come about through dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) which cannot itself be characterised by any of these four positions (*catuṣkoṭi*).

According to Warder allusions to early texts are found in *MMK*. xiii. 1 where the *Dhātuvibhaṅgasūtra*[14] is invoked. The rejection of extreme opinions (*dṛṣṭi*) such as whether things (*dharma*) are eternal or non-eternal contained in *MMK*. xxvii also seems to follow some version of the *Brahamajālasūtra*.[15] He concludes that in *MMK*:

> There are no terms peculiar to the *Mahāyāna*. There is no evidence that Nāgārjuna had ever seen any *Prajñāpāramitā* text ... for him the most important canonical text is the *Nidāna Saṃyukta*.[16]

It appears that Nāgārjuna, if we accept Warder's thesis, does not stand outside the early Buddhist tradition in order to set up an entirely independent school of thought. In the last chapter we met with the idea that the purpose of the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* was not to counter the arguments of all-comers, but rather to check the excesses of a certain group of *Abhidhārmikas*, and this may well be the case with *MMK*. Rather than establishing a new teaching therefore, Nāgārjuna can be seen as someone engaged in the defense of orthodoxy. The question as to whether Nāgārjuna was, or was not, a *Mahāyānist* is perhaps irrelevant. One can certainly sympathise with Kalupahana's feeling that:'

> ... it is now time to exorcise the terms *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* from our vocabulary[17]

However one should be aware of the rather overstated nature of the case put forward by this author in his study of *MMK*, particularly since, as Williams points out,[18] Kalupahana accepts that *Ratnāvalī* is a work of Nāgārjuna.

That a so-called proto-*Madhyamaka* strand of thought is to be found in the *Tripiṭaka* there can be no doubt. If we look at some of the earliest Buddhist writings, i.e. the *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Parāyanavagga* of the *Suttanipāta*, we are immediately reminded of Nāgārjuna's assertion that all views (*dṛṣṭi*), because they are generated by the dichotomising tendencies of the mind (*prapañca*) which give rise to thought construction (*vikalpa*), are to be rejected. Although, as we shall see, Nāgārjuna does not negate

14 Pali *M*. iii. 245ff
Chinese: *Taisho* (26) No 162.
15 Pali *D*. i. 1ff
Chinese: *Taisho* (1), No 21.
16 *op. cit.* p. 80–81.
17 Kalupahana (1986) p. 5–6.
18 Williams, P. 'Review of D. J. Kalupahana: Nāgārjuna... (1986)' *J.R.A.S.* 2 (1987) p. 362–366.

reality as such, he does reject all theories associated with pinning it down. This is also the position of the *Suttanipāta* when it says:

> Giving up assumption, unattached, he builds no reliance on knowledge itself ... he does not rely on any view whatsoever ... he who has no leanings here to either of the two extremes; being or non-being, here or beyond, he has no moorings whatsoever, no clutching while distinguishing among *dharmas*. He has not formed even the least apperception in what is here seen, heard or thought..[19]

Gomez's[20] study of this early material demonstrates that the origin of false views bears remarkable similarity to the aetiology suggested by the writers of the *Madhyamaka*. Gomez states:

> ... what is the cause of our preferences and attachments? The misdirected mind, specifically the wrongly applied faculty of apperception (*sañña*). Apperception leads to dualities, graspings, conflicts and sorrow because of its two primary functions: its power to conceptualise and define (*saṃkha*) and its tendency toward division and multiplicity (*papañca*). The capacity of these faculties to generate friction and frustration is reinforced by the root apperception of "I" and "mine".[21]

However, and here again the equivalence with Nāgārjuna is clear, the author of the *Suttanipāta* is not enunciating a position of nihilism in the sense that, with the rejection of all views based on the dichotomy of being and non-being, everything comes to an end. He is simply saying that in such a state an enlightened person has transcended the erroneous impulse to construct theories about the nature of reality. The appropriate response for a mind which has moved into *nirvāṇa* therefore is to remain at peace and not to be disturbed by the desire to talk since, as language itself is infected at its root by false dichotomies based on notions such as being and non-being, even an enlightened person cannot use language successfully to give an accurate picture of reality. At best language must remain a heuristic device used for the purpose of hinting at things which cannot be successfully articulated. As the *Suttanipāta* puts it:

> Of him who has gone to cessation there is no measure, there is nothing in terms of which one could speak of him. When all *dharmas* have been uprooted, all the ways of speech have also been uprooted.[22]

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19 *Sn.* 800–802
Attaṃ pahāya anupādiyāno ñāṇe pi so nissayaṃ no karoti
sā ve viyattesu na vaggasārī diṭṭhim pi so na pacceti kiñci
yassūbhayante paṇidhīdha n'atthi bhavābhavāya idha vā huraṃ vā
nivesanā tassa na santi keci dhammesu nicheyya samuggahītā
tassīdha diṭṭhe va sute mute vā pakappitā n'atthi aṇū pi saññā
taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ diṭṭhiṃ anādiyānaṃ kenīdha lokasmin vikappayeya.

20 Gomez (1976).

21 *ibid.* p. 142.

22 *Sn.*1076
Atthaṅ gatassa na pamāṇam atthi uspasīvā
ti bhagavā: yena naṃ vajju taṃ tassa n'atthi

> The silent one (*muni*) does not speak of "equal", "low" or "high", serene, having left all attachment to self behind, he does not grasp at anything nor does he reject anything.[23]

Nāgārjuna adopts such a position.

> The bringing to rest of all apprehending is the bringing to an end of the dichotomising tendencies of the mind and this is peace. No *dharma* anywhere has been taught by the Buddha of anything.[24]

For him the recourse to speech and language inevitably leads to error, and by such a recourse one can never know the true nature of things. The true nature of things (*tattva, dharmatā*) is only to be apprehended in *nirvāṇa*. Language leads away from this state.

> Those who describe the Buddha in detail, who is unchanging and hence beyond description, are defeated by such description and do not see the *Tathāgata*.[25]

Only when mental discrimination is brought to an end is *nirvāṇa* achieved and at such a point language grinds to a halt.

> When the wandering of the mind (*cittagocara*) is brought to a halt, the realm of words also ceases. This indeed is *nirvāṇa* which is neither originated nor destroyed, the true nature of things (*dharmatā*).[26]

Reality then is not contaminated with dichotomous thought (*prapañca*) or thought construction (*vikalpa*) and is non-differentiated (*anānārtham*).[27] Commenting on *MMK*. xviii Candrakīrti holds that the world of suffering is brought about by erroneous views concerning *tattva*. At this point he presents his own truncated form of the classical twelve-linked *pratītyasamutpāda* to account for the unenlightened state. In his schema the first link in the chain is appropriation (*upalambha*) which gives rise to the other members which, in turn, are dichotomising thought (*prapañca*), thought

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sabbesu dhammesu samūhatesu
samūhatā vādapathā pi sabbe ti.

23 *Sn*. 954
na samesu na omesu na ussesu vadate muni
santo so vītamaccharo nādeti na nirassatī: ti Bhagavā ti.

24 *MMK*. xxv. 24
sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivaḥ
na kvacit kasyacit kaścid dharmo buddhena deśitaḥ.

25 *MMK*. xxii. 15
prapañcayanti ye buddhaṃ prapañcātītam avyayaṃ
te prapañcahatāḥ sarve na paśyanti tathāgataṃ.

26 *MMK*. xviii. 7
nivṛttaṃ abhidhātavyaṃ nivṛttaś cittagocaraḥ
anutpannāniruddhā hi nirvāṇaṃ iva dharmatā.

27 *MMK*. xviii. 9
aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcair aprapañcitaṃ
nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya lakṣaṇaṃ.

construction (*vikalpa*), erroneous attachment to "I" and "mine" (*aham-mameti-abhiniveśa*), defilement (*kleśa*), actions (*karma*), and old-age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*).[28] The generation of such a causal series is destroyed when the appropriation (*upalambha*) which causes it is destroyed. When this activity (the equivalent of ignorance (*avidyā*) in the classical formula) is brought to rest the factors leading to old-age and death do not arise and there is *nirvāṇa*. Reality (*tattva*) is, from this point of view, always beyond the reach of knowledge and speech. This, according to Candrakīrti, is the meaning of Nāgārjuna's statement that the Buddha has never taught anything. Considering the close similarity between the early *Suttanipāta* and later *Madhyamaka* doctrine with regard to speech and silence there appears to be a case for establishing some sort of influence of the former on the latter, or at the very least for proposing a tendency with regard to this particular doctrine common to both periods of Buddhist thought.

The question we must now ask is, what happens to the mind once *prapañca* etc. have been brought to cessation? Are we correct in assuming that this will result in a state totally devoid of any mental activity, a state of total unconsciousness, or will the mind continue to operate but in an entirely different manner from its unenlightened mode? In other words is there mind or some state of mind in *nirvāṇa*? Let us look at the early Buddhist tradition first. Now the *Suttanipāta* itself refers to people having attained *nirvāṇa*. Their minds (*cittāni*) are said to be free from the obsessions.[29] In other texts it is clear that the mind still functions for it is said to be "well composed and free",[30] "and of such a nature that it will not return to the world of sense desire"[31] after having attained enlightenment. Such a state of mind is of a different order from that characterised by the turmoil created by *prapañca*, *vikalpa* etc. It may be that these two states are referred to respectively by *citta* and *vijñana*, where *citta* is somehow at a deeper level and unconditioned by activities at the interface between mind and matter. *Vijñāna* on the other hand is conditioned, dependent on *prapañca*, constantly changing and hence differentiated. It is only brought to a halt in *nirvāṇa*. Since *vijñāna* is one of the terms of the classical *pratītyasamutpāda* series and arises dependent on ignorance (*avidyā*) it stands to reason that when *avidyā* is uprooted *vijñāna* will come to an end. However, and this is a very important point, it should not be assumed that such an event signals the total extinction of mental processes. Johansson confirms this supposition. He notes that, in *nirvāṇa*:

> ... although *viññāna* is "stopped", still an act of differentiated understanding can

28 *Prasannapadā* de la Vallée Poussin (ed.) p. 350–1. For an investigation into the classical form of this formula cf. chapter 7 *supra*, particularly n. 13.

29 *Sn.* 149: *āsavehi cittāni vimuccimsū*.

30 *Theragāthā* 1: *cittaṃ me susamāhitaṃ vimuttaṃ*.

31 *A*. iv. 402: *anāvattidhammaṃ me cittaṃ kāmabhavāyā*.

> take place, so the "stopped" *viññāna* refers to a different layer of consciousness than the momentary surface processes ... There are simply, according to the early Buddhist analysis, two layers of consciousness; what we call the momentary surface processes and the background consciousness.[32]

The background state is often spoken of in terms of being "an immovable, unfluctuating mind",[33] and as "deep, immeasurable and unfathomable as the great ocean".[34] We will come to see, in an examination of a nexus of doctrines connected with this mental background state which we must defer until the final chapter, that such images clearly anticipate some of the so-called developments in the psychological system outlined in the works of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga.

One important aspect of *citta*, when in the state of *nirvāṇa*, particularly relevant to our discussion of the overlap between early Buddhism and Nāgārjuna is treated in the *Majjhimanikāya*. Here we are told that *citta* is associated with emptiness. In a state which clearly refers to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, the mind (*citta*) is said to be free from the obsessions of sensuality (*kama*), becoming (*bhava*) and ignorance (*avijja*), and the monk comes to understand that such a conscious state represents an emptiness[35] of the obsessions (*āsava*). This emptiness (*suññatā*) is associated with a permanent state of mind (*citta*), equivalent to *nirvāṇa*, and deriving from the cessation of *viññāṇa*.[36] *Nirvāṇa* is also associated with emptiness in the *Therīgathā*.[37] These references to emptiness in the early Buddhist canon do seem to emphasise the fact that emptiness is a state in which subjectivity and objectivity break down. When processes habitually met with in the unenlightened state (i.e. *āsravas*, *prapañca*, *vikalpa*) are eradicated the distinction between self and other can no longer be established. The result is an intimate union between the knower and the known. Although one may talk provisionally of the knowledge of a Buddha it must always be born in mind that this knowledge itself transcends any distinction between epistemology and ontology. Crucial in the eradication of all the factors that contribute to the unenlightened state is *prajñā* (Pali-*paññā*). It is responsible for bringing to an end the obsessions (*āsravas*).

32 Johansson (1969) p. 109.

33 *Theragāthā* 649: *asamhīraṃ asaṃkuppaṃ cittaṃ.*

34 *M.* i. 487: *gambhīro appameyo duppariyogāho seyyathā pi mahāsamuddo.*

35 *M.* iii. 106–108.
Tassa evaṃ jānato evam passato kāmasavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati
bhavāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati avijjāsavā pi cittaṃ vimuccati...
so suññaṃ idaṃ saññāgataṃ kāmāsavenāti pajānāti; suññaṃ idaṃ
saññāgataṃ bhavāsavenāti pajānāti; suññaṃ idaṃ
suññāgataṃ avijjāsavenāti pajānāti.

36 *Sn.* 734 *viññāṇassa nirodhena.*

37 *Therīgathā* 46: The arahant Uttamā says she is the winner of emptiness and the signless (*suññatassānimittassa lābhinī*) on attaining *nibbāna*.

... having seen by means of *paññā*, the obsessions (*āsavā*) are completely destroyed.[38]

Prajñā is ultimately responsible for bringing ignorance (*avidyā*) to an end, and consequent on this the entire *pratītyasamutpāda* series.

If *paññā* is developed, what result will it lead to? All ignorance is abandoned.[39]

In other words when *prajñā* is generated, *vijñāna* and all the other twelve links are stopped, there is no suffering, and a person enters *nirvāṇa*. Now Dignāga, admittedly a later author, holds *prajñā* to have the same efficacy in the *Mahāyāna* as it seems to have in the early texts. He says:

Prajñāpāramitā is non-dual knowledge (*advayajñāna*), and that is the *Tathāgata*. The treatise and the spiritual discipline, as leading to this end, receive the same application.[40]

In fact, as has already been mentioned in Chapter One, many commentators hold the major function of the *Prajñāpārimitā* corpus to be to expound and help generate *prajñā*, which is felt to be the chief of the perfections (*pāramitās*). Many scholars, not least Murti, have held that the *Prajñāpāramitā* is the major literary influence on Nāgārjuna. However since there is no direct reference to *prajñā* in the *MMK* one must agree with Warder that the thesis has not been proven. What evidence do we possess to suggest that a notion of *prajñā*, even though not explicitly expressed, is important for an understanding of *MMK*? Let us follow up Dignāga's hint that *prajñā* is a synonym for non-dual knowledge (*advaya-jñāna*). In the first place Candrakīrti, (and we are bearing in mind the fact that as a commentator 400 years removed from Nāgārjuna we should not place too much trust in his interpretations) at the very beginning of his *Prasannapadā*, comments on the centrality of non-dual knowledge (*advay-ajñāna*) in the *Madhyamaka* system.[41] Murti of course bases his interpretation of the *Madhyamaka* on Candrakīrti. For Murti:

Non-dual knowledge (*jñānaṃ advayaṃ*) is the abolition of all particular viewpoints which restrict and distort reality.[42]

The sole concern of the *Mādhyamika advayavāda* is the purification of the faculty of knowing. The primordial error consists in the intellect being infected by the inveterate tendency to view Reality as identity or difference, permanent or

38 *M.* i. 477: *paññāya c'assa disvā āsavā parikkhīṇā honti.*

39 *A.* i. 61 *Paññā bhāvitā kaṃ atthaṃ anubhoti? Yā avijjā sā pahīyati.*

40 Quoted in *Abhisamayālaṃkārāloka of Haribhadra*. G. Tucci (ed.) Gaedwak Oriental Series, Baroda Vol LXII (1932) p. 153.
The quotation is from Dignaga's *Prajñāpāramitā Pindārtha Nirdeśa*
prajñāpāramitā jñānam advayam sā tathāgataḥ
sādhyā tādarthayogena tācchabdyaṃ granthamārgayoḥ.

41 *Prasannapadā* de la Vallée Poussin (ed.) p. 26.

42 Murti (1960) p. 214.

> momentary, one or many etc. ... With the purification of the intellect, intuition (*prajñā*) emerges; the Real is known as it is, as *Tathatā* or *bhutakoṭi*.[43]

Now one problem with Murti's approach, even though we have examined many of the doctrines of *MMK* and found them to generally support his view, is that he is too heavily reliant on the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. Although we may find support for the *P.P.* notion that the non-appropriation of all things (*yo'nupalambhaḥ sarvadharmānām*) is the perfection of *prajñā*,[44] there is no evidence to suggest the fact that Nāgārjuna held the view that "non-dual knowledge (*prajñā*) is contentless intuition".[45] Nāgārjuna's psychological position in connection with questions as to whether *prajñā*, or for that matter any form of consciousness, has content or is contentless, is not sufficiently well developed. One cannot fall on one side or the other in this matter. This issue remains essentially undeveloped until a much later date in the history of Buddhist thought. Centuries after Nāgārjuna it became the subject of a heated debate with the self-confessed *Sākāravādins*, like Jñānaśrīmitra and Ratnakīrti, holding there to be a content to consciousness while the *Nirākāravādins*, such as Ratnākaraśānti, thought consciousness to be devoid of an object.[46] As far as we are aware the first writer to introduce such a distinction is Bhāvaviveka, in his late work the *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa*.[47] Here he retrospectively assigns the former position to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and the latter to Vasubandhu and Asaṅga. Murti is therefore jumping to conclusions which cannot be justified.

What then can we know concerning the existence or non-existence of consciousness in the enlightened state? In the first place, nowhere in the *MMK* does Nāgārjuna reject the existence of consciousness as such. In fact his position appears to be very much the same as that presented in the *Suttanipāta*. How is this so? Well, to start with, Nāgārjuna seems to attach a greater degree of conditionality to *vijñāna* than to any other mental state. This is not surprising since in the early tradition, *vijñāna* is seen to be conditioned by the *pratītyasamutpāda* process and can be brought to a halt. In his critique of the five faculties (*cakṣurādīndriya*) Nāgārjuna brings his thesis to light:

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43 *ibid.* p. 217.

44 *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* Bibliotheca Indica p. 177:
Skandha dhātvāyatanam eva hi subhūte śūnyaṃ
viviktaṃ śāntaṃ iti hi prajñāpāramitā ca skandadhatvāyatanaṃ
cādvayaṃ etad advaidhīkāraṃ śūnyatvād viviktatvād evaṃ
śāntatvān nopalabhyate yo'nūpalambhaḥ sarvadharmānāṃ
sa prajñāpāramitetyucyate.

45 Murti *op. cit.* p. 219.

46 In connection with this debate cf. Kajiyama (1965) p. 26–37.

47 *MRP.* IV. 2, cf. Lindtner *Bhavya's Critique...* (1986) p. 248.

As a son is said to have come about through the mother–father relationship, so therefore does *vijñāna* come about through the relationship between the eye and material form.[48]

Similarly in his analysis of the twelve links (*dvādaśāṅga*) of *pratītyasamutpāda* Nāgārjuna holds that *vijñāna* is conditioned by mental predispositions (*saṃskāra*) while at the same time being the cause of name and form (*nāmarūpa*).[49] This is entirely consonant with the classical formulation of the twelve links found in the *Tripiṭaka*.[50] Now we have already seen how, in the early literature, *viññāna* is said to be stopped once *nirvāṇa* is reached. Nāgārjuna holds exactly the same position since for him:

By the cessation of every (link of *pratītyasamutpāda*) none function. Thus that single mass of suffering is completely destroyed.[51]

In other words, once the momentum of the chain of becoming is broken, none of its individual links can be maintained and they consequently cease to function. This is the suppression of suffering (*duḥkha*) and is equivalent to *nirvāṇa*. Since *vijñāna* is one of the links concerned we must assume that for Nāgārjuna *nirvāṇa* may be characterised as, among other things, the cessation of *vijñāna*. Are we to assume by this that *nirvāṇa* must be a state devoid of consciousness? Nāgārjuna is quick to point out that this is not the case. He makes a distinction between the enlightened and the unenlightened person. The distinction between the two is that, while the latter under the influence of ignorance (*avidyā*) creates mental predispositions (*saṃskāra*) etc., the former has cut ignorance at its root through the application of *jñāna*. When *jñāna* is operative ignorance does not arise and all the factors conditioned by ignorance have no efficacy. The enlightened one therefore, through the agency of *jñāna*, sees reality (*tattva*) as it is.

Thus the ignorant create the mental predispositions which are the root of *saṃsāra*. One who creates (such predispositions) is ignorant. The wise person is not (one who creates) because he sees reality (*tattva*). When ignorance ceases mental predispositions do not come into existence. The cessation of ignorance comes about through the cultivation of *jñāna*.[52]

48 *MMK.* iii. 7
pratītya mātāpitarau yathoktaḥ putrasambhavaḥ
cakṣūrūpe pratītyaivam ukto vijñānasaṃbhavaḥ.
Professor Lindtner has kindly pointed out that this verse is not really from *MMK* but from *Ratnāvalī*. cf his *Nāgārjuna's Filosofiske Vaerker*.

49 *MMK.* xxvi. 2
vijñānaṃ saṃniviśate saṃskārapratyayaṃ gatau
saṃniviṣṭe'tha vijñāne nāmarūpaṃ niṣicyate.

50 e.g. *M.* iii. 63–64.

51 *MMK.* xxvi. 12
tasya tasya nirodhena tat tan nābhipravartate
duḥkhaskandhaḥ kevalo 'yam evaṃ saṃyag nirudhyate.

52 *MMK.* xxvi. 10–11

Now we have already noted that the term *prajñā* is not used on any occasion in *MMK*. This must not in itself be conclusive evidence that Nāgārjuna does not entertain the notion of such a faculty. As we have already noted the terms *prajñā* and *jñāna* form a nexus in which it is very difficult to distinguish the precise significance of each term. The most we have been able to suggest is that *jñāna* may designate the end process in the development of *prajñā*. Be that as it may, it is clear that there is a well defined distinction between the mental state or states designated by *vijñāna* and that designated by *prajñā/jñāna*. We have already seen, in the earliest strata of Buddhist literature, that while *vijñāna* refers to a conditioned surface state of consciousness only available to the unenlightened, *prajñā/jñāna* refers to the unconditioned vision of reality. If this is the case, let us not be over influenced by subtle semantic points. Rather let us cast our attention to the structure of *MMK* to ascertain whether Nāgārjuna admits the possibility of *prajñā*, even though it be under another name.

We have seen that the characteristic of the unenlightened mind is its habitual tendency to distort reality. This is brought about by a number of factors including *prapañca* and *vikalpa* which, in turn, are conditioned by ignorance (*avidyā*). *Nirvāṇa* is the cessation of these factors. As Nāgārjuna has it:

> On account of the destruction of karma and defilement (*karmakleśa*) there is liberation (*mokṣa*). The *karmas* and defilements are mentally constructed (*vikalpataḥ*). They arise because of dichotomous thought (*prapañca*). Dichotomous thought is brought to cessation through emptiness (*śūnyatā*).[53]

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) then is a state of consciousness in which dichotomous thought (*prapañca*) no longer holds sway. It is a state of mind dehabituated from its ignorant tendency to distort. As such the attainment of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) must, by definition, be incommunicable and unknowable since it is the transcendence of all dichotomies, including subjectivity and objectivity. The attainment of emptiness may be understood as the dawning of *gnosis*, though remembering our previously stated view, all description must remain provisional. Ultimately there can be no differentiation between knower and known in such an elevated state, and the distinction between epistemology and ontology collapses.

Now we have noted that in the *Majjhima Nikāya* emptiness represents a state of mind which is free from the defilements of the obsessions

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saṃsāramūlān saṃskārān avidvān saṃskaroty ataḥ
avidvān kārakaḥ tasmān na vidvāṃs tattvadarsanāt
avidyāyāṃ niruddhāyāṃ saṃskārāṇām asaṃbhavaḥ
avidyāyā nirodhas tu jñānenasyaiva bhāvanāt

53 *MMK.* xviii. 5
karmakleśākṣayān mokṣa karmakleśā vikalpataḥ
te prapañcātprapañcastu śūnyatāyāṃ nirudhyate.

(*āsrava*). We are consequently in a better position to interpret the curious *MMK*. xviii. 7.

> *nivṛttam abhidhātavyam nivṛttaś cittagocaraḥ*
> *anutpannāniruddhā hi nirvāṇam iva dharmatā*

in which *nirvāṇa* is equated with the cessation of *cittagocara*. Now *cittagocara* has variously been translated as the realm of thought, the domain of thought, the mind's functional realm etc., but it is clear that these are unsatisfactory renderings since they imply that the mind is brought to a halt in *nirvāṇa*. Although the term *gocara* does imply the range of something, such a meaning is secondary since in many cases it implies ranging in the sense of wandering about. In such circumstances the term *cittagocara* would be better translated as the wandering about of the mind. As the cow (*go, gaus*) is an undisciplined animal wandering wherever its fancy takes it, so also is the mind of an unenlightened being. *Nirvāṇa* then is the suppression of an unruly mind, made to wander here and there by the action of *prapañca* etc. This interpretation of *nirvāṇa* is quite congruent with our understanding derived from early Buddhist literature. In many senses it also rescues Nāgārjuna from one aspect of the charge of nihilism (since if *nirvāṇa* was total unconsciousness why should anyone be motivated to strive for it, or rather could it not be attained through suicide?), and fits in well with the general tenor of the text of *MMK*. Nowhere are we told that *nirvāṇa* is a non-conscious state. Rather it is always defined as a state free from those mental factors which are associate with *vijñāna*. Hence:

> Not related to anything in a conditional way, at peace, not elaborated by dichotomous thought, free of thought construction, undifferentiated. Such are the characteristics of reality (*tattva*).[54]

In the last verse of this chapter Nāgārjuna goes on to say, quite explicitly, that enlightenment is a state of mind.

> If fully accomplished Buddhas do not arise, and the *Śrāvakas* disappear, then independently the *jñāna* of the *Pratyekabuddhas* is produced.[55]

We are now in a good position to tie together most of the central concepts of Nāgārjuna's system and subject them to our own interpretation. In the first place *śūnyatā* is not a metaphysical ontological concept. Nāgārjuna is not an absolutist. Stcherbatsky[56] is quite wrong to find in the term *śūnyatā*

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54 *MMK*. xviii. 9
aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcair aprapañcitaṃ
nirvikalpaṃ anānārthaṃ etat tattvasya lakṣanaṃ.

55 *MMK*. xviii. 12
saṃbuddhānām anutpāde śrāvakāṇāṃ punaḥ kṣaye
jñānaṃ pratyekabuddhānāṃ asaṃsargāt pravartate.

56 Stcherbatsky (trans.) *Madhyāntavibhaṅga: Discourse on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes*. Calcutta (1971) p. 3 (reprint of Bibliotheca Buddhica XXX).

a concept similar to the Absolute Idea of Hegel. There is no evidence in the *MMK* that *śūnyatā* has an ontological dimension, that it develops in a dialectical process, or that it may be rendered in English as "relativity". In fact *śūnyatā* is something quite the opposite of a thing. It is a state in which the imputation of "thingness" (*svabhāva*) is no longer operative. All of this is quite clearly borne out by the important Chapter XXIV of *MMK* (*Āryasatya parīkṣā*). By contrasting the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) with the ultimate (*paramārtha*) truths, Nāgārjuna here distinguishes between worldly understanding and the understanding of the wise. He goes on to demonstrate that while the latter has its basis in the former, nevertheless the ultimate vision of things is free from the substantialising tendency of the conventional. Since this substantialising tendency is intimately connected with the imputation of self-nature, the ultimate (*paramārtha*) must be empty of such self-natures. The ultimate then is emptiness (*śūnyatā*). We may be tempted to infer that this state is equivalent to *jñāna*. When the mind is empty of the defilements which lead to a distorted picture of reality (*tattva*), i.e. the defilements leading to the imposition of notions such as being and non-being, the mind is no longer held in the turmoil of ignorance (*avidyā*) and becomes enlightened. *Śūnyatā* therefore describes the state of enlightenment or *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* seems to correspond to a mind empty of the defilements. In *saṃsāra*, on the other hand, a general condition of mind operates in which factors determined by ignorance (*avidyā*) predominate. This being so, a distorted vision of reality, dependent on the individual's personal desires and cravings is established.

> The status of the birth-death cycle is due to grasping (*upādayā*) and dependence (*pratīya*). That which is neither grasping nor dependent is taught to be *nirvāṇa*.[57]

Nirvāṇa represents an exalted state of mind, and the achievement of this state, empty of the defilements, will not entail a fundamental change in the structure of reality. It is rather a radically different way of looking at reality. This is why Nāgārjuna says that *nirvāṇa* can be neither described in terms of existence nor non-existence.[58] It is essential to bear in mind the previously stated view that *nirvāṇa* transcends any distinction of subjectivity or objectivity.[59] In this sense it would be wrong to assign any ultimate epistemological or ontological value to it. *Nirvāṇa* signifies a condition in which there is an intimate union of seer and seen. It is a state in which thought constructive processes which generate dichotomies of all kinds are no longer operative.

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57 *MMK* xxv. 9
ya ājavaṃ javībhāva upādāya pratītya vā
so'pratītyānupādāya nirvāṇaṃ upadiśyate.

58 *MMK*. xxv. 10
...nabhāvo nābhāvo nirvāṇam iti yujyate.

59 *supra* p. 56.

Saṃsāra may more readily be understood as an epistemic state in which *prapañca* operates. Nāgārjuna's statement that:

> There is no difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*;
> There is no difference between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.[60]

correctly interpreted, is true in the provisional sense that, since *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* seem to be orientations towards one ontological category which Nāgārjuna calls reality (*tattva*), there can be no *essential* difference between them. They are both states of mind. They do not refer to radically different reality structures. Reality (*tattva*) is the ontological base for the appearance of both the enlightened and the unenlightened world views. The difference between them is purely conventional since, while the samsaric epistemological orientation generates an imaginary world picture complete with internal contradictions which lead to suffering, the nirvanic orientation reveals things as they are (*yathābhūtam*), involves no contradictions, and is at peace (*śānta*). Its operations reveal the true nature of things (*dharmatā*).

If we look at *MMK.* xxiv. 14 again (cf. *supra* chapter 2 n. 28)

> *sarvaṃ ca yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya yujyate*
> *sarvaṃ na yujyate tasya śūnyaṃ yasya na yujyate*

it is clear what is meant. When it is said that whatever is in correspondence with emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is in correspondence, we may suspect Nāgārjuna of holding the view that when the mind is empty of defilement, everything is seen correctly. Conversely when the mind is not empty, things are not seen correctly.

Having ascertained that in speaking of *nirvāṇa* or *saṃsāra* Nāgārjuna is dealing with epistemological orientations towards reality (*tattva*) we may now decide the exact status of *tattva* in Nāgārjuna's system. Actually there has been a great deal of scholarly debate as to the correct interpretation of *MMK.* xxiv. 18.

> *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracaksmahe*
> *sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā*

It is clear that in the overall context of its appearance in a chapter devoted to examining the doctrine of the four noble truths, which in the process counters an opponent's claim that *śūnyatāvāda* leads to an abandoning of these truths and to a position in which morality appears absurd, Nāgārjuna tries to give his own version of the Middle Way (*madhyamā pratipad*) which avoids the extremes of nihilism or eternalism. We have already discussed at some length the fact that these extremes depend on notions of existence

60 *MMK.* xxv. 19
na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇaṃ
na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇaṃ.

and non-existence, which in their turn are the result of the actions of *prapañca*, *vikalpa* etc. This is why it is said that *nirvāṇa* cannot be characterised in terms of either of these concepts. It is concept-free. In the light of this how will we interpret *MMK.* xxiv. 18?

The first hemistitch reads "We declare that dependent origination is emptiness (*śūnyatā*)." On the relationship between *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* Stcherbatsky states that:

> In *Mahāyāna* it (i.e. *pratītyasamutpāda*) is synonymous with the central conception of the *Mādhyamikas* and means their idea of Relativity or Negativity (*madhyamā pratipad* = *śūnyatā* = *pratītyasamutpāda*). cp. XXIV 18.[61]

We may wish to disagree with Stcherbatsky's translation of technical terms, but will accept that emptiness and dependent origination are ultimately synonymous. Now, from a provisional point of view, emptiness refers to a state of mind devoid of defilement and appears to be used epistemically in *MMK.* Again dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), particularly as treated in the *maṅgalaśloka*, is provisionally an ontologically indeterminate existence realm; indeterminate in that it cannot be spoken of in terms of mutually exclusive categories such as existence and non-existence. It is free from dichotomous thought and at peace. The synonymous nature of *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* is revealed from the ultimate point of view, since while conventionally they refer respectively to mental and extra-mental entities or processes, ultimately there is union between the two. The knowledge of the Buddha transcends the distinction between self and other.

Turning to the second hemistitch we notice first of all that *śūnyatā* of the first hemistitch is now termed a metaphorical designation (*prajñaptir upādāya*). The meaning of this is quite clear. *Śūnyatā* should not be hypostatised, as Stcherbatsky wants it to be. Also it is a metaphorical designation not meant to convey the fact that *pratītyasamutpāda* is essentially empty, in the sense of non-existent, but rather that in reality *pratītyasamutpāda* may not be characterised in terms of dichotomously opposed concepts. This is the true meaning of the Middle Way. Put simply *MMK.* xxiv. 18 conveys the fact that Nāgārjuna adheres to the Middle Way laid down by the Buddha and expounded by the early traditions. Although reality (*tattva* = *pratītyasamutpāda*) is essentially non-describable in terms of existence or non existence (it is ontologically indeterminate—the true sense of the Middle Way which avoids the two extremes), the unenlightened mind confers such definitions upon it. Only when the mind is emptied of the defilements which lead to superimposition will it appreciate *tattva* as it is. While *śūnyatā* may provisionally be taken as the nirvanic state of mind, ultimately it refers to a condition which transcends epistemology and

61 Stcherbatsky (1927) p. 81.

ontology. The final verse of Nāgārjuna's analysis of the four noble truths puts his entire system into perspective.

> He who perceives *pratītyasamutpāda* also sees suffering, the arising of suffering, its destruction and the path.[62]

In fact, *pratītyasamutpāda* is the base not only for the arising of *duḥkha* but also for its extinction. Through ignorance (*avidyā*) the other eleven factors arise which contribute to the distorted vision of this base. Through knowledge which has been purged of those same factors the basis is seen as it is. It is clear that in the final analysis Nāgārjuna does hold to a concept of *prajñā* even though it is not specifically referred to in *MMK*. Implicit in his system is a concept of mind purged from all the factors which lead it to a distorted vision of reality and this purified mind is structurally related to the idea of *prajñā* found in both the early Buddhist writings and the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Finally, to follow up one loose strand, we may add that there is justification in saying that, for Nāgārjuna, this state of mind may be referred to as non-dual knowledge (*advayajñāna*) since we have already seen that it transcends states in which things are described in dichotomously related terms.

Returning to Warder's initial thesis, it appears that much that has been said above tends to confirm his position. With the possible exception of a couple of novel terms, such as the reference to the city of the *gandharvas* (*gandharvanagara*), it has hopefully been demonstrated that the central core of *MMK* deals with doctrine which differs very little from that contained in much of the early Buddhist writings. That Nāgārjuna does have an opponent to whom his arguments are addressed is certain. It seems an overestimation to say that his target is early Buddhism in general for two good reasons. Firstly, he appears to quote some early texts with approval, but secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there is a strong congruence between his position and the position of early texts. The idea that Nāgārjuna has somehow abandoned the whole of the early teaching and set up a new school called the *Mahāyāna* must be seen as an inadequate understanding of his role in the history of Buddhist thought.

It is far more likely that Nāgārjuna stands as someone attempting the defence of orthodoxy against new and possibly heretical teachings. The heterodox teachings which are most likely to have been his target will be those which concentrated strongly on the *dharma* theory of existence. Schools, such as the *Sarvāstivāda*, held that only *dharmas* are ultimately real (*paramārtha*) while other things which were believed to be built out of combinations of these primary building blocks, in other words the things

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62 *MMK* xxiv. 40
yaḥ pratītyasamutpādam paśyatīdam sa paśyati
duḥkhaṃ samudayaṃ caiva nirodhaṃ mārgam eva ca.

of the everyday world, were merely conceptual. As Warder[63] has pointed out, one of Nāgārjuna's principle targets in *MMK* is the idea of the existence of *dharmas*. The heart of this critique is that the existence of *dharmas* is incompatible with the concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Both the *Abhidhārmikas* and Nāgārjuna accept *pratītyasamutpāda*, but Nāgārjuna shows that an assumption that *dharmas* exist implies "exist always", and this is the extreme position of eternalism. He goes on to prove that a process of dependent origination is made absurd if one holds that *dharmas* always exist. Given the fact that *pratītyasamutpāda* is the central teaching of the Buddha, and hence inviolable, for *dharmas* are to be operative in *pratītyasamutpāda* they cannot be immutable and must be devoid of own-nature (*niḥsvabhāva*).

The own-nature (*svabhāva*) doctrine was probably formulated in the *Sthaviravāda* commentaries before 100 AD[64] and is not explicitly mentioned in the tradition of the *Sarvāstivāda*. However given the time Nāgārjuna was probably writing, and particularly some of the contents of *MMK* (e.g. ch xv—Examination of *svabhāva*), it seems highly feasible that *MMK* serves a two fold purpose. Firstly as a polemic against the increasing widespread influence of the *Abhidhārmika dharma* theory and its later developments including the theory of own-nature (*svabhāva*), and secondly as an attempt to reinforce and renew an essentially unchanged treatment of the central doctrines of liberation according to the early teaching. As Warder puts it:

> From all this it seems clear that Nāgārjuna accepts the *Tripiṭaka*, in an ancient form recognised probably by all schools of Buddhists as the teaching of the Buddha, but attacks what he sees as misinterpretations of it by the scholastic traditions of the schools. He professes to be simply restoring the original meaning of the old *sūtras*, showing that the innovations of the schools lead to contradictions and in particular conflict with what he takes to be the essential teaching, namely conditioned origination. This is hardly going over to the new *Mahāyana* movement ...[65]

We conclude this chapter with many more questions left to answer, but we have seriously examined the idea that Nāgārjuna overthrew the whole of the Buddhist tradition to establish a new school. We can now see him not as an innovator, but as an expositor following in a long and honorable tradition. Our next task is to establish the correct position of the *Vijñānavādin* authors Asaṅga and Vasubandhu in the Buddhist tradition, and once this is done to compare what they have to say, particularly concerning the nature of reality and the enlightened and unenlightened mind, with Nāgārjuna's own position. It is only through such a process that one can

63 *op. cit.* p. 82–3.
64 cf. Adikaram *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* Migoda (1946).
65 Warder *op. cit.* p. 84.

attempt a reliable comparison between the so-called *Yogācāra* and *Madhyamaka* schools of Buddhism.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROBLEM OF MAHĀYĀNA "SCHOOLS"

The second great moment in the history of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is generally considered to coincide with the establishment of the *Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda* school of Maitreya, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. The dating of this entire period of Indian history is beset with a multitude of problems connected with both the paucity of sources and the ambiguous identifications of authors and writings prevailing at this time.

The case of Nāgārjuna himself is paradigmatic. Warder[1] asserts the existence of more than one author of this name, but since his Nāgārjuna I is attributed with all the works that concern us, his theory need not detain us unduly. Accepting Bu-ston's statement that Nāgārjuna is a pupil of Rahulabhadra (c. 120 AD), Warder assigns the former to the second century of the Christian era[2] and in this he is supported by Lamotte,[3] Winternitz,[4] and Murti.[5] Either side of this date we find Shackleton Bailey[6] going for the end of the first century, and Walleser placing Nāgārjuna[7] in the third. Ruegg[8] is altogether more cautious, being content to say that:

> Nāgārjuna is generally believed to have been born and to have worked in South-Central India (South Kosala or Vidarbha?) early in the first millenium P.C.

Opinions on the date and identities of the authors of the *Yogācāra* are equally diverse. Those accepting the historicity of Maitreya tend to place him at the turn of the fourth century AD,[9] with Asaṅga, on whom the former's dates are calculated, generally coming out as being active sometime within the mid-fourth century. Both Warder,[10] and Yamada[11] more or less agree here, though the actual dates do not correspond exactly.

With Vasubandhu matters are complicated yet again. In an influential article, Frauwallner has argued, on the basis of discrepancies in the traditional accounts (particularly in Paramārtha's *Life of Vasubandhu*),[12]

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1 Warder, A.K. *Indian Buddhism*. Varanasi (1970) p. 375.
2 *ibid.* p. 374.
3 Lamotte, É. *Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*. Louvain (1944) Vol. I, p. x
4 Winternitz, M. *History of Indian Literature*. Calcutta (1933) Vol. II, p. 342.
5 Murti (1960) p. 87.
6 Shackleton Bailey, D. *Śatapañcāśatka of Mātṛceṭa*. Cambridge (1951) p. 9.
7 Walleser, M. 'Life of Nāgārjuna in Asia Major' in *Hirt Anniversary Volume* (1923) p. 423.
8 Ruegg (1981) p. 4.
9 Yamada (1977) p. 158, gives Maitreya's date as c.270–350 AD.
10 *op. cit.* p. 436, gives Asaṅga's date as c.260–360 AD.
11 *op. cit.* p. 158, gives c.310–390 AD for Asaṅga.
12 Takakusu, J. (trans.) 'The Life of Vasubandhu by Paramārtha' *T'oung Pao* Leiden,

for the existence of two authors with the name Vasubandhu. Again this need not worry us over much since the writer of the *Mahāyānist* texts which are of interest to us is claimed, by Frauwallner[13], to be the younger brother, and therefore contemporary, of Asaṅga. We should note in passing that more recent research by Schmithausen[14] suggests that *Sautrāntika* elements in both the *Mahāyānist Viṃśatikā* and *Triṃśikā*, attributed to Vasubandhu, reveal him to be the author of the *Abhidharmakośa* and not the brother of Asaṅga. Be that as it may the problem of the "Vasubandhus" is far from resolved and need not overly detain us here. Jaini nicely sums up the research on this question of dating:

> Takakusu favoured A.N. 1100 and proposed A.D. 420–500 as the period of Vasubandhu. In 1911 P.N. Peri, after a thorough investigation of all available materials on the subject, proposed A.D. 350. Over a period several scholars, notably Professor Kimura, G. Ono, U. Woghihara, H. Ui, and many others, contributed their views on this topic, which were summed up in 1929 by J. Takakusu, who again tried to establish his previously proposed date of the fifth century A.D.[15]

Clearly Takakusu's[16] date is too late to allow us to maintain a close relationship between him and Asaṅga and we will be better off sticking to the date Frauwallner gives to Vasubandhu I, in which he agrees with Ui[17] and others, of sometime in the fourth century.

We have, or will have, cause to refer to a number of other important writers in this book. Regarding later *Yogācārins* the consensus seems to put Vasubandhu's commentator Sthiramati in the mid sixth century[18] thus making him a contemporary of Bhāvaviveka.[19] We tend to find Nāgārjuna's important, though late, commentator Candrakīrti unanimously held to have lived in the mid-seventh century, though la Vallée Poussin puts him a little earlier, "towards the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century".[20]

Taking into account the details of the foregoing discussion we should be wary about ascribing exact dates to any of the authors mentioned. We

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Vol. 5 ser. II (1904) p. 269–296.

13 Frauwallner, E. *On the date of the Buddhist master of the law, Vasubandhu* Serie Orientale Roma, III. Roma (1951).

14 Schmithausen (1967).

15 Jaini, P. S. 'On the Theory of Two Vasubandhus' *Bulletin of the London School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. XXI (1958), p. 48.

16 Takakusu, J. 'The Date of Vasubandhu' *Indian Studies in Honor of Charles Rockwell Lanman*. Cambridge, Mass. (1929) p. 79–88.

17 Ui, H. *ibid.* p. 101ff.

18 Kajiyama (1968) p. 203.

19 Warder (*op. cit.* p. 465) gives the end of the sixth century AD. Ruegg. (*op.cit.* p. 71) prefers c. 600–650 AD.

20 *Madhyamakāvatāra* la Vallée Poussin (trans.) p. 250.

may however be fairly confident in putting forward a general chronological schema which will allow us the luxury of determining a rough progression. The chart below will be appropriate:

Nāgārjuna	1st–2nd century AD
(Maitreya ?), Vasubandhu and Asaṅga	4th century AD
Sthiramati	6th century AD
Bhāvaviveka	6th century AD
Candrakīrti	7th century AD

Now, while the *Madhyamaka* school has received a good deal of attention from Western scholars and possesses a burgeoning secondary literature, the *Yogācāra/Vijñānavadā* has been relatively neglected. This neglect has contributed to a long standing misunderstanding concerning the principle doctrines expounded by the authors of this "so-called" new school. A number of influential writers have attempted to put forward the idea that the establishment of the *Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda* heralded an entirely new epoch in the development of Buddhist thought. This epoch is characterised by an abandonment of the principal positions of the old Buddhist tradition and the erection of a new intellectual edifice which has as its fundamental feature an interpretation of Buddhist doctrine from an idealistic point of view. This problematic approach to the subject has a number of sources. We have already noted how the use of commentarial texts, particularly those written some time after the root text itself, can give rise to misleading results. One of the earliest studies on the subject is a work by S. Lévi[21] which attempts an outline of the *Vijñaptimātra* system as contained in Vasubandhu's *Viṃśatikā* and *Triṃśikā*. To do this Lévi relied entirely on Chinese and Japanese sources. Now the Chinese mind was already strongly influenced by Mencian idealism before the arrival of Buddhism in that country. It is therefore hardly surprising that Chinese translations of Sanskrit texts, which deal predominantly with psychology, epistemology and ontology, would convey a strongly idealistic flavour. That Lévi should reach the conclusion that Vasubandhu, having criticised the realistic systems of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, would set about the task of erecting a system based upon an idealistic absolute is not unexpected. Thus, talking about the *Viṃśatikā*, Lévi says:

> Vasubandhu, avant d'exposer en détail sa propre doctrine de l'idéalisme absolu s'attache à refuter les objections de principe qu'on peut lui opposer à l'intérieur de l'église bouddhique elle-même; puis il s'attaque à la théorie atomique des *Vaiśeṣikas*, l'interprétation physique de l'univers la plus puissante que le génie hindou ait élaborée, et qui s'était insinuée dans le bouddhisme, jusque chez les *Vaibhāṣikas* du Cachemire que Vasubandhu avait longtemps suivis avec sympathie.[22]

21 *Lévi* (1932).

Lévi gives the impression that this work represents a radical disjunction from what has gone before, both among Buddhists and their opponents. The Swiss scholar J. May, substantially repeats Lévi's position, though in an attenuated form, that here we are confronted with a new school of Buddhist thought, propounding a new philosophical idealism.

> Du IIIe au VIIe siècle de notre ère, selon la chronologie la plus souvent admise, la pensée bouddhique en Inde a trouvé une expression particulièrement brillante dans l'école dite du *Vijñānavāda* ... Les catégories qui gouvernent la pensée philosophique en Occident s'appliquent mal, en général, à la pensée indienne. Pourtant on peut admettre, sans trop forcer les choses, que le *Vijñānavāda* est un idéalisme.[23]

The other major source of problematic interpretation is Stcherbatsky who has also influenced a generation of scholars. Stcherbatsky did not depend on Chinese sources, for the most part concentrating his efforts on Sanskrit originals, supplemented by Tibetan translations when necessary. Although the general problem of translation still arises when Tibetan materials are used things are a little more straightforward. While the Chinese already had a long history of philosophical speculation and literature which was bound to influence the reception of Buddhist ideas, this was not the case with pre-Buddhist Tibet. While it would be over simplistic to claim that the Tibetan mind was a *tabula rasa* before the arrival of Buddhism, in comparison to China the level of philosphical speculation would be expected to be relatively low and the influence of earlier traditions probably had a limited impact on the reception of Buddhist philosophical ideas. Of course this would not necessarily have been the case with regard to other religious elements such as, ritual, cosmology, demonology, etc. Although Stcherbatsky did not have the problems which beset the predominantly French Sinologists, his handicap was just as serious. His work indicates a great desire to demonstrate the fact that Buddhist thought, in its many aspects, mirrored the central position of the German idealist philosophies. He was particularly keen to show a correspondence between *Mahāyāna* Buddhism and Hegel or Kant, although on many occasions other luminaries of the Western philosophical firmament are invoked to demonstrate the essential similarity between Eastern and Western philosphical speculation. Therefore, while Stcherbatsky's overall work has been immensely influential in the growth of Buddhist studies, he is one of the first Buddhist apologists in the West. His conclusions on the *Yogācāra* reflect this stance. For him authors like Vasubandhu are expounding a species of absolute monism. *Yogācāra* philosophy is:

> ... the denial of Pluralism and the vindication of Monism, with the implication that this Monism has a superstructure of phenomenal Relativity or that the phe-

22 *ibid.* p. 7.
23 May (1971) p. 265

> nomenal Relativity has a subjacent foundation of Absolute, non-relative Reality ... This Absolute represents the unique substance of the Universe (*ekamdravyam*). There is no other substance. It embraces the totality of everything relatively real, but is itself the non-relative Absolute.[24]

This attitude has spilt over into more recent work in much the same way that Lévi's has. Thus Murti, who seems to follow the line taken by Scherbatsky, takes the view that:

> The Idealism of the *Yogācāra* (*Vijñānavadā*) school has to be understood as a significant modification of the *Mādhyamika śūnyata* on a constructive basis.[25]

It appears that Indian authors who have taken a particular interest in the *Yogācāra* have, without exception, been under the influence of these two prevailing tendencies. For them the *Yogācāra* is both idealistic and a form of absolute monism. A.K. Chatterjee is a good example of this synthetic approach. Concluding his book *"The Yogācāra Idealism"* he says:

> Idealism is one of the greatest philosophies of the world, and the *Yogācāra* system, it has been the contention of this essay, represents idealism in its pure epistemological form. It cannot be stigmatised as merely subjectivism, since absolutism is its inevitable logical goal. In spite of being absolutism however it does not give up its idealistic bias.[26]

Finally a more recent book on the work of Vasubandhu reiterates all that has been said before. For K. N. Chatterjee[27] the *Yogācāra* school set itself the task of avoiding the nihilistic tendencies of the *Madhyamaka* by proposing the idea that everything that exists is mind-only (*cittamātra*).[28] Williams, in a recent survey of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, is aware of the pitfalls inherent in such an approach. Nevertheless, basing himself squarely on the Tibetan characterisation of *Yogācāra* as *cittamātra* (Mind-only) (Tib: *sems tsam*), he starts his chapter on this phase of Buddhist thought by stating rather ironically

> Something, as we shall see, really exists![29]

The stimulus for this a statement appears to come from his reading of *Madhyāntavibhāga MV.* 1.2 where we are told that "the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*) exists". Williams finds the view that the *cittamātra* tradition assigns no greater reality to mind than to any other entity unconvincing and adds

> ... in these cases the negation of mind (*citta/vijñāna*) is not a negation of the really

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24 Stcherbatsky, Th. *Madhāntavibhaṅga* (reprint 1971) p. 4–5.
25 Murti *op. cit.* p. 104.
26 Chatterjee (1975) p. 229.
27 Chatterjee, K.N. *Vasubandhu's Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi with Sthiramati's Commentary* Varanasi (1980).
28 *ibid.* p. xxxvi.
29 Williams (1989) p.80.

> existing non-dual system of perceptions which are by their very nature mental, but only of the mind as subject.[30]

I partially concur here but do not believe that this statement has the force that Williams would wish to claim. The *Yogācāra* clearly wants to refute the ultimacy of the subject/object dichotomy but there is no justification in taking *abhūtaparikalpa* to be a non-dual mental reality. We will come back to this objection later.[31]

In the last few pages I have attempted an outline of what has come to be the established orthodoxy among Buddhist scholars in relation to the position of *Yogācāra* school both historically and philosophically. However there have been a number of people who have disagreed with this point of view. For them the small discrepancies between Nāgārjuna and the *Yogācāra* authors are far outweighed by the overwhelming concord of their writings. According to these authors neither Nāgārjuna nor Asaṅga nor Vasubandhu are system-builders in the generally accepted sense of the term. Rather, they have set themselves the common task of rendering traditional Buddhist doctrine in such a way that it can be used to tackle particular problems. Furthermore it is pointless categorising them as nihilists or idealists or anything else as the kind. They should be seen as expositors, adapting traditional doctrine to meet the needs of particular tasks while at the same time leaving the body of doctrine fundamentally unchanged and unquestioned.

D.T. Suzuki seems to have been the first person to take up this matter and argue for a de-emphasis of the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* "schools" approach:

> Most Buddhist scholars are often too ready to make a sharp distinction between the *Mādhyamika* and the *Yogācāra* school, taking the one as exclusively advocating the theory of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) while the other is bent single-mindedly on an idealistic interpretation of the universe. They thus further assume that the idea of emptiness is not at all traceable in the *Yogācāra* and that idealism is absent in the *Mādhyamika*.[32]

What Suzuki appears to be getting at here is that one should be cautious of identifying a Buddhist school merely on the basis of its treatment of a single issue. In some senses it is a misnomer to refer to the *Madhyamaka* as *Śūnyatāvāda* because this indicates that the doctrine of *śūnyatā* is the central doctrine of such a school. As we have already seen this would be a simplistic interpretation. Similarly the use of the term *Vijñānavāda* as descriptive of the writings of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu tends to overemphasise the position played by *vijñāna* in their works.

30 *ibid.* p. 89.
31 cf. Ch. 6 *infra*.
32 Suzuki, D.T. *Eastern Buddhist* IV (1928) p. 255. Reprinted in Suzuki, D.T. *Studies in the Laṅkāvatārasūtra* London (1968) p. 170.

L. de la Vallée Poussin is an exception amongst scholars working in French. He is less inclined to make a hard and fast distinction between *Mahāyānists*. It seems that in his statement:

> Peut-on douter qu'il y ait *Mādhyamikas* et *Mādhyamikas*, *Yogācāras* et *Yogācāras*?

he is suggesting that some authors have associated themselves as adherents of one school or the other, while other *Mahāyāna* authors have not. It appears to me that the idea of belonging to a school of thought was a fairly late development in the history of Buddhism in India and in all probability neither Nāgārjuna, nor Asaṅga, nor Vasubandhu considered themselves in such a manner. This is a major topic which we shall return to later in the chapter.

In more recent times W. Rahula has outlined the above position in more detail. For him the idea that the authors of the early *Mahāyāna* were involved in the expounding systems of philosophy in contradiction with each other is clearly absurd. On the contrary:

> Their contribution to Buddhism lay not in giving it a new philosophy, but providing, in fascinatingly different ways, brilliant new interpretations of the old philosophy. But they all solidly based themselves on the ancient Canonical texts and their commentarial traditions.[33]

Rahula believes, that in many senses, the work of writers like Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu are analogous to the Pali commentarial literature sometimes ascribed, though he believes incorrectly, to Buddhaghosa. Nāgārjuna then, while he places emphasis on the doctrine of *śūnyatā*, is not introducing anything new into Buddhist thought. We have already seen the concept of emptiness is found at a number of places in the *Tripiṭaka*. Similarly the *Yogācāra* concern with consciousness (*vijñāna*, *citta*) is not in the slightest bit innovative. The interaction between the external world and mental processes and the consequent world views generated is a theme at all periods in the history of Buddhist thought. Rahula, however, very firmly points out the error in interpretations that attempt to show that the *Yogācāra* teaching of *vijñaptimātratā* is one which introduces a notion of absolute reality into Buddhist doctrine. This appears to me to be exactly the tone of Stcherbatsky, and his followers', interpretations. For Rahula this position is totally opposed to the fundamental axioms of Buddhist thought and hence quite unacceptable. In conclusion he says:

> The *śūnyatā* philosophy elaborated by Nāgārjuna and the *cittamātra* philosophy developed by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu are not contradictory, but complementary to each other. These two systems known as *Mādhyamika* and *Yogācāra* or *Vijñānavāda*, explain and expound, in different ways with different arguments, the very same doctrines of *nairātmya, śūnyatā, tathatā, pratītyasamutpāda*, but are not a philosophy of their own which can properly be called Nāgārjuna's or Asaṅga's

33 Rahula (1972) p. 324–330.

> or Vasubandhu's explanations, arguments and theories, postulated to prove and establish the Canonical teaching of *śūnyatā, cittamātra* or *nairātmya*. If any differences of opinion exist between them, these are only with regard to their own arguments and theories, advanced to establish the old fundamental Canonical teaching, but not with regard to the teaching itself.[34]

It is clear that the controversy we have been looking at is nothing new. Many other early Buddhist commentators have left a similarly confusing message. It seems to me that the root of the problem may be traced to a passage in the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* which mentions the threefold turning of the wheel of *Dharma* (*dharmacakrapravartaṇa*). Unfortunately the Sanskrit text is no longer extant, but Lamotte translates the passage that concerns us, from Tibetan, thus:

> At first in the deer park in Varanasi, the Lord set the wheel of *Dharma* in motion for adherents of the Disciples' Vehicle (*śrāvakayāna*) in the form of teaching about the four Noble Truths .. However this setting in motion was surpassed, gave rise to criticism, contained an implicit meaning (*neyārtha*) and became the subject of controversy .. As a result the Lord set about teaching that all phenomena are without essential nature, not produced, not destroyed, originally quiescent and by nature in a state of *Nirvāṇa*. This second wheel of *Dharma* he set in motion for adherents of the *Mahāyāna* in the form of teachings about emptiness ... Finally the Lord taught that all phenomena are without essential nature ... This third wheel of *Dharma* which is perfectly expounded he set in motion for adherents of all vehicles. This setting in motion is unsurpassed, does not give rise to criticism, contains an explicit meaning (*nitārtha*) and is not a subject of controversy.[35]

Now, although it seems fairly clear what the first turning of the wheel of dharma refers to since it appears to be the Buddha's first sermon on the Four Noble Truths, it is less obvious how the second and third turnings should be interpreted. In fact the subject is open to a good deal of debate, but I have been unable to find any Indian Buddhist author who specifically associates individual *Mahāyāna* schools with the last two turnings. It is more usual to associate these turnings with particular sections of *Mahāyāna* canonical literature. There is no harmony of opinion here however. According to Tibetan sources[36] Bhāvaviveka held the second turning to reflect the teaching of the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* while the third was in conformity with the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus. In another source, Dharmapāla inverts the sequence identifying the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras* with the second and the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* with the third turning. The author of this source, Won ch'uk, gives us his opinion on the subject. He feels that

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34 *ibid*. p. 326–7.

35 *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra. L'explication des mystères* Texte tibétain édité et traduit par Lamotte, É Paris (1935)
Saṅdhi VIII 30.

36 *Tibetan Tripiṭaka* Vol. 106 14d: 3–8.
quoted in Hirabayashi and Iida (1977) p. 347–9.

the second turning was initiated by Nāgārjuna's authorship of several *śāstras* including *MMK*. The third coincides with the composition of *śāstras* by Maitreya, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. This is substantially the same position as that held by Tsoṅ-kha-pa.[37] It seems likely that the ascription of different turnings of the wheel of *dharma* to different "schools" of the *Mahāyāna* was a fairly late development in Buddhist history. It is noteworthy that for Won ch'uk, even at the time of Dharmapāla (since Prabhāmitra was Dharmapāla's disciple), there was thought to be no fundamental conflict between the work of Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. Thus:

> At that time (i.e. the time of Vasubandhu) there was no controversy over *śūnyatā* and *bhāva* (existence). This is the reason why Bandhuprabha or Prabhamitra said, "A thousand years ago, the taste of the Buddha's teaching was one. Thereafter, the *smṛti* (*dran pa*) and *prajñā* have gradually deteriorated, which caused the rise of controversy over existence and non-existence".[38]

We must take care that the picture of *Mahāyānist* harmony at this period is not seen through rose tinted spectacles. It seems likely that Bhāvaviveka was a rough contemporary of Dharmapāla and we shall see later in our discussion that the former author manifests the first real desire to reduce the continuum of *Mahāyāna* thinking into a series of relatively discrete philosophical moments. Nevertheless another piece of evidence to suggest that a widely held notion of *Mahāyāna* schools was a late development, possibly contemporaneous with the transmission of Buddhism to Tibet, is provided by Atiśa (c.980–1056AD). In his *Bodhimārgadīpapañjikā*, the autocommentary to his famous *Bodhipathapradīpa*, we are given the distinct impression that the matter of "schools" and their relative merits have still not finally settled, since he speaks of his own gurus as if they had not really plumped for one side or the other in the dispute. He says:

> In India learned men have claimed that Ārya Asaṅga advocated a modification of the Teaching (*deśanāparyāya*) for he took the meaning of *prajñāpāramitā* to be representation-only (*vijñaptimātra*) and at present this is also the opinion of my guru Suvarnadvīpa and guru Sāntipa. Ācārya-Nagārjuna however preached the essence of the Teaching (*deśanāsāra*) for he understood the meaning of *prajñāpāramitā* in the deep sense of the Middle Way (*mahāmadhyamakārtha*) transcending being and non-being and this was also advocated in the tradition of other learned men. At present this is also the opinion of my guru Bodhibhadra and *bhaṭṭāraka* Kusulupa.[39]

From what we can gather from this quotation Atiśa acknowledges his debt

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37 Tsoṅ-kha-pa *Legs-bśad-sñin-po* T. no 5396 quoted by E. Conze and S. Iida (1967) p. 231.

38 *Tibetan Tripiṭaka* Vol. 106, 16b 7–8 and 16c 1–2 quoted by Hirabayashi and Iida *op. cit.* p. 355–6.

39 *Bodhipathapradīpa* and *Bodhimārgadīpapañjikā* Peking ed. *Tibetan Tripiṭaka* No. 5344 Ki fol 322al—324b4 lines 205–208 quoted by Lindtner (1981) p. 210.

to a number of gurus, some of whom accept Asaṅga to be the source of a correct tradition for the interpretation of the *Dharma*, others accepting Nāgārjuna. In a later verse Atiśa comes down on the side of the latter, but it seems to me that since he regards all of his teachers with respect, and claims Asaṇga and Nāgārjuna to be *Ārya*- and *Ācārya* respectively, we are not even at this point in Buddhist history, looking at someone who considers one teaching to be inferior to the other.

Sectarian rivalry certainly seems to be even less evident several hundred years before Atiśa. Ārya Vimuktisena probably lived about a hundred years before Candrakīrti, which means, according to Ruegg,[40] around the first half of the sixth century. Vimuktisena is considered by the Tibetan pseudo-historians to be the founder of the "so called" *Yogācāra-Madhyamaka* synthesis. It is thought that such a synthesis came about partially through Vimuktisena's studies in the school of Dignāga and partially through his studies of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Now we know that the Buddhist traditions hold Nāgārjuna's main scriptural influence to have been the *Prajnāpāramitā* corpus, and Dignāga to have been a member of a lineage of exegesis which stems from Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. It seems strange that someone could bring together two radically opposed systems of thought and end up with a workable system, as Vimuktisena is alleged to have done. We must conclude that, here again, we have someone who, to all intents and purposes, seems quite happy to study in two separate traditions of exegesis. This conclusion must strengthen the case that these two traditions were not hostile to one another.

An interesting point in connection with Ārya Vimuktisena concerns his commentarial works, and in particular his commentary, on Maitreya's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*. The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* is a summary and commentary on all the important doctrines of the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus and was written, according to Bu-ston[41], from the point of view of the *Yogācāra-Mādhyamika-Svātantrika* school (*Rnal-'byor-spyod-pa'i-dbu-ma-raṅ-rgyud-pa*), which is curious since Maitreya is generally considered to be the mythical instructor of Asaṅga, and therefore for those who see *Māhāyana* Buddhism in terms of schools, to be the founder of the *Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda*. One wonders why someone seeking to establish a rival school to Nāgārjuna should wish to write a treatise on the *Prajñāpāramitā* if, as many authors believe, it is amenable only to an interpretation from the standpoint of the *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka*. Now according to Obermiller[42] the Tibetan tradition assigns all the great *Madhyamaka* authorities on the *Prajñāpāramitā* to the branch which we have referred to as the *Yog-*

40 Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 87.

41 cf. Obermiller, 'The Sublime Science of the great Vehicle to Salvation' *Acta Orientalia* IX (1931) p. 83.

42 *op. cit.*

ācāra-Mādhyamika-Svātantrika. He goes on to say, that the exponents of this commentarial work include Ārya Vimuktisena, Bhadanta Vimuktisena and Haribhadra, and that Tibetan writers of Tsoṅ-kha-pa's school also follow the same method of interpretation. This is a strange fact since Tsoṅ-kha-pa considers himself to be a *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* following the line laid down by Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* and *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*. Taking all this into account it looks very much as though we have confirmation for our view that the development of Indian *Mahāyāna* Buddhism should not be seen as a series of discrete and diverging schools. Rather fundamental doctrines were illuminated in different ways by different seminal writers for non-sectarian purposes. Each of these important authors seems to be applying doctrine to the solving of particular problems, such as attack by opponents, heretical views, or the cultivation of spiritual discipline, all within a given context.

Ruegg, who is generally resistant to this interpretation, preferring his own ideas which involve the evolution of schools, acknowledges the position, although quite unconsciously. He mentions the fact that "several *Yogacārin/Vijñānavādin* masters wrote commentaries on works by Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva".[43] This is borne out by the fact that Atiśa[44] mentions one of the eight standard commentaries on *MMK* used in his day to be that written by Ācārya Sthiramati. As we shall see, Sthiramati is mainly relevant in modern Buddhist studies as the major commentator on Vasubandhu. To most scholars he is a *Yogācārin*. Ruegg goes on to suggest that the authors that followed Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva paid particular attention to those details of the Buddhist tradition which are given scant attention in the writings of the *Yogācāra*. In his discussion of the work of Śāntarakṣita, Ruegg says:

> the *Yogācāra-Madhyamaka* synthesised the pure *Madhyamaka* which it regarded as perfectly valid and adequate with respect to the *paramārtha*—with a form of philosophical analysis derived from the *Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda*, a school which by the eighth century had attained a high degree of development and whose achievements could not, it was evidently thought, be ignored by the *Madhyamaka*.[45]

This statement gives the impression that the fusion of the two "schools" was made for negative reasons, since it was perceived by the *Madhyamaka* that it would be better to have the *Yogācāra* as an ally than as an enemy. It seems much more likely that the synthesis has no origin in a particular point of time. The two ways of treating fundamental doctrines run parallel to and mutually condition one another. The advent of the *Yogācāra-Madhyamaka*, which to a certain extent seems to be a retrospective invention

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43 Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 87.

44 cf. *Bodhimārgadīpapañjikā* in Lindtner (1981) p. 211.

45 Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 88.

of the Tibetan pseudo-historians, is only formally established at a much later period in Buddhist doctrinal history.

There is a section in Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* in which, according to Ruegg, he compares the *Vijñānavāda* with the *Madhyamaka*. This section is supposed to demonstrate the fact that the outlook of the former may be considered to be a philosophical propaedeutic which ultimately leads to the outlook of the latter. However if one examines the text this view cannot be upheld. It says:

> On the basis of *cittamātra* one is to know the non-existence of external things and on the basis of this system one is to know complete non-substantiality, riding the chariot of the two systems and holding the reins of reasoning (*yukti*), (the philosopher) therefore attains the sense as it is, the *Mahāyānist* one itself.[46]

Ruegg interprets this to mean that the *cittamātra* viewpoint, once it is won, is superseded by a system that establishes complete non-substantiality (*niḥsvabhāvatā* or *śūnyatā*). However this is an idiosyncratic rendition. In the first place we have already suggested in our treatment of Nāgārjuna's work, particularly in chapter three above, that while he holds to a doctrine of non-substantiality or emptiness, this is in a very specific sense. For Nāgārjuna unenlightened cognition, infected with thought constructive tendencies (*vikalpa*, *prapañca* etc.), distorts reality leading to the imputation that entities (*dharmas*) possess substance or own-being (*svabhāva*). However in reality the existence of such entities cannot be established since they exist only due to distortion caused by ignorance (*avidyā*). In other words mentally constructed phenomena overlay true reality (*tattva*) and prevent its *gnosis* by the unenlightened. These mentally constructed phenomena do not exist in reality. In Nāgārjuna's works, we have two stages in the development of the enlightened mind outlined. In the first there is the realisation that all things perceived by the ignorant are actually mental constructions, and in the second these mental contents are realised to be devoid of substantiality. This being so, Nāgārjuna can be said to progressively combine the doctrine of *cittamātra* with that of complete non-substantiality. As we shall see in the following chapter, exactly the same can be maintained by a careful analysis of the work of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. For them the realisation that the unenlightened world view is characterised by mental construction (*cittamātra*; *vijñaptimātra*) leads to a rejection of the basis for such a view. This is followed by subsequent transformation to the state of *gnosis* (*jñāna*) in which things are understood without the thought constructive tendencies of the unenlightened state intervening. This results in knowledge devoid of thought construction (*nirvikalpajñāna*).

46 *Madhyamakālamkāra* 92–93 (*Madhyamakālaṃkāra vṛtti* fol. 79a-b), quoted by Ruegg *op. cit.* p. 90.

Returning to the quotation from Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* then, it seems that Ruegg's interpretation is inadequate. Nowhere does Śāntarakṣita refer to the terms *Madhyamaka* or *Vijñānavāda*. On the contrary he simply refers to the *Mahāyānist* as someone who has moved from a realisation of *cittamātra* to the realisation of complete non-substantiality, and as we have said this position is held by both Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. It seems clear that there is no evidence to suggest that Śāntarakṣita holds the *Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda* to be a preparatory stage on a path to the *Madhyamaka* outlook. It would be nearer the spirit of the quotation to say that he held both outlooks to be the core of the *Mahāyāna*, although it may be said that they complement one another.

It may be noted that at the present stage of historical scholarship into the development of the *Mahāyāna* it is impossible to say exactly when the differentiation into schools actually happened but, from what we have noted above, a reasonable assumption may be that it took place shortly before, and probably during, the transmission of the tradition to Tibet. It is probable that the nature of the transmission was such that Buddhism was introduced by Indian teachers brought up in particular lineages. This was certainly the case with Śāntarakṣita, Atiśa, etc. Each lineage could be expected to have its own peculiar method of interpretation and, in the early days, those unfamiliar with the tradition as such could easily confuse methods of interpretation, based on differing terminology, with sectarian differences. Such an attitude would naturally be passed on and formalised by the later systematisers and pseudo-historians such as Bu-ston. Their work, which as been utilised by students of Indian Buddhism, has coloured attitudes with the result that nowadays most authors accept the proposition that Indian *Mahāyāna* Buddhism comprised a number of exclusive and doctrinally incompatible schools of thought, even though there is little early evidence from primary sources to support such a conclusion.

Now the traditional Buddhist view about the path to Buddhahood is that it is gradual and progressive. It was this view that defeated the *Ch'an*-like notion of sudden enlightenment put forward by the Chinese protagonist the Hva-śaṇ at the Council of bSam-yas sometime in the 8th century. The view can be traced back to the early *Tripiṭaka*:

> Just as the great ocean dips gradually, ebbs gradually, slopes gradually and not suddenly like a precipice, so in my doctrine and my discipline, the access to perfect knowledge (*aññāpaṭivedha*) is achieved by gradual practice (*anupubbasikkhā*), a gradual action (*anupubbakiriyā*), a gradual way (*anupubbapaṭipadā*) and not directly (*na āyatakena*).[47]

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47 *Vin.* ii. 238; *A.* iv. 200–201; *Udāna* 54.
seyyathā pibhikkhave mahāsamuddo anupubbaninno anupubbapoṇo anupubbapabbhāro n'āyataken'eva papāto evam eva kho bhikkhave imasmiṃ dhammavinaye anupubbasikkhā anupubbakiriyā anupubbapaṭipadā

This position is observed by many *Mahāyānist* authors who developed a teaching which emphasised the sense of gradual progress. The form which such a teaching takes is very often one in which a particular stage in the path is linked with the realisation of a particular attainment characteristic of a certain stage of mental development. The stages (*bhūmi*) in the progress of the *Bodhisattva* are one example in point, but others more relevant to our present discussion are to be found in the early *Yogācāra*, as well as in the writings of Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti. In these texts we find the progress of someone seeking Buddhahood described in four stages characterised by progressively higher comprehension of reality. The *Yogācārabhūmi*, which was probably written by Asaṅga, gives the following stages:

(i) The stage of reality established by the world (*loka-prasiddha-tattvārtha*)
(ii) The stage of reality established by reasoning (*yukti-prasiddha-tattvārtha*)
(iii) The stage of reality in which the mind is purified of the obstacles of the defilements (*kleśāvaraṇa-visuddhi-jñāna-gocara-tattvārtha*)
(iv) The stage of reality in which the mind is purified of the obstacles of the knowable (*jñeyāvaraṇa-visuddhi-jñāna-gocara-tattvārtha*) [48]

The first two stages refer respectively to common sense and the world-view formulated through philosophical thought. Stage three is supposed to come about upon the realisation of non-existence of self (*pudgala-nairātmya*), while stage four follows from the realisation of the non-substantiality of things (*dharma-nairātmya*). Stage four is in fact the equivalent of the purest knowledge of ultimate reality (*yathābhūta*, *tathatā*, *dharmatā*, *śūnyatā*), according to the text. In other words it is equivalent to *nirvāṇa*.

There are some structural similarities between this scheme and the one outlined in Bhāvaviveka's *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* (*MRP*). In chapter 4 of this text we are told that the generation of *prajñā* comes about in a three-fold manner. Firstly, through learning Buddhist doctrine (*śrutamayī*), secondly by thinking about it (*cintāmayī*) and lastly, by meditating on it and putting it into practice (*bhāvanāmayī*). Only in the final stage are all forms of mental discrimination brought to cessation. At this level one obtains the ultimate truth beyond inference (*aparyāyaparamārthasatya*). In probably the earliest exposition of its kind, Bhāvaviveka links this scheme to a hierarchy of Buddhist and non-Buddhist teaching such that the disciple is held to move from ignorance of the word of the Buddha, through the position of the *Śravakas*, and the *Yogācāra* and finally to that of the *Madhyamaka*. A very similar doctrine is presented in Candrakīrti's *Prasan-*

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n'āyataken'eva aññāpativedho.

48 *Yogācārabhūmi* (No 1579; Vol. 30, 486b-c) quoted by Yamada *op. cit.* p. 160.

napadā. Commenting on *MMK*. xvii. 8, which mentions the graded teaching of the Buddhas (*buddhānuśāsanam*), Candrakīrti reveals that there are four levels of understanding corresponding to that of an ordinary person, that of someone who has not eradicated the obstacles (*āvaraṇa*), that of someone who has partially eradicated the obstacles, and finally that of the Ārya.[49] This corresponds very well with the previous schemes of Asaṅga and Bhāviviveka. Interestingly enough it also ties in with the account of the three turnings of the wheel of *dharma* (*dharmacakrapravartaṇa*) given in the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra*. There we are told of three teachings, the first being introductory, the second and third being implicit and explicit (hence unsurpassed) respectively.

It appears that the first level of understanding given by Asaṅga, Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti refers to a non-Buddhist understanding and is therefore not mentioned in the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra*. However once someone enters the path they enter the second stage or the first turning of the wheel of *dharma*. Consequently the second turning corresponds to the third stage, and so on. It is clear that what has been thought to be a reference to schools and their respective merits in the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra*, may in fact be reference to distinct levels of attainment in spiritual practice. Neither Asaṅga nor Candrakīrti associate these levels of attainment with any particular school of thought. Certainly Bhāvaviveka does make this explicit connection, though it is interesting to us that it is not picked up by Candrakīrti. In fact little more seems to be heard of the distinction until the Tibetan period.

One further point needs to be cleared up before we turn to an examination of the thought of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Many of Bhāvaviveka's works contain extensive and often ill-tempered attacks on the *Yogācāra*. Among other uncomplimentary descriptions he accuses Vasabandhu and Asaṅga of "possessing mediocre minds"[50] and having an "undigested conceit [like the]... stench of hatred's putrid meat".[51] Similarly it is well known that there is, in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*,[52] a celebrated critique of the *Vijñānavāda*. A number of articles[53] in recent years have used this critique to point out radical differences between the *Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka* and the *Vijñānavāda*. As P.G. Fenner makes clear:

> There is some controversy among contemporary scholars as to whether the *Vijñānavāda* is a genuine idealism. Independent of the outcome of that controversy it is clear that Candrakīrti interprets the *Vijñānavāda* as "idealism".[54]

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49 *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā avec la Prasannapadā* la Vallée Poussin (ed.) p. 370f.

50 *MRP*. IV.10 cf. Lindtner 'Bhavya's Critique...' (1986) p. 252.

51 *MHK*. V.75–83. cf. *ibid*. p. 241

52 *Madhyamakāvatāra par Candrakīrti* la Vallée Poussin (ed.) (1970) p. 117f.

53 Including (a) Olson (1974) (b) Fenner (1983).

It is certainly true that during the course of his critique Candrakīrti uses the term *Vijñānavādin*, although it must be said that it only crops up in the autocommentary. The problem is that the doctrines ascribed to the *Vijñānavāda* do not correspond with those expounded by Vasubandhu or Asaṅga. Candrakīrti directs his main criticism at notions adopted by the *Yogācāra* such as the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), and the doctrine of the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), but these are represented in a way not intended by the latter. Let us examine the view offered by Candrakīrti that, for the *Vijñānavāda*, reality is ultimately (*paramārtha-satya*), nothing other than mind (*cittamātra*).

Now, many canonical texts state that mental processes have a profound effect on the way reality is understood and one of the most influential sources in this connection is the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* which states that:

> This triple world is nothing but mind (*cittamātra*); the twelve members of existence (*bhavāṅga*), which have been distinguished and proclaimed by the Tathāgata, they all depend on mind.[55]

Since this is a canonical source of Candrakīrti cannot reject it, so he attempts to interpret it in an unusual way.[56] For him the *sūtra* has a provisional meaning in the sense that it draws on the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*). It has been spoken by the Buddha to destroy adherence to the notion of a permanent and personal agent (*kartṛ*) which results in action (*karman*). This is precisely Bhāvaviveka's objection in *MRP*. IV. For him *Yogācārasūtras* such as the *Laṅkāvatāra, Saṅdhinirmocana, Ghanavyūha*, as well as the *Daśabhūmika*, are all to be understood in a provisional sense (*neyārtha*) when they refer to mind-only (*cittamātra*). Thus:

> ... the Buddhas and the Boddhisattvas have only advocated mind-only (*cittamātra*) in order to refute the [soul or] agent (*kartṛ*) and enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*) conceived to be different from consciousness (*vijñāna*) by the heretics (*paratīrthika*). It is *not* in order to refute the external empirical world (*bāhyaviṣaya*).[57]

The notion of *cittamātra* should not be viewed in an absolutely idealistic sense. For Bhāvaviveka, then, it is propogated as a doctrine merely to uphold the ancient notion of non-self (*anātman*). Before moving on, it will be worth our while to briefly investigate the earlier quoted passage from the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* in context. Schmithausen[58] has noted that this

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54 Fenner *ibid.* p. 258 n2.

55 *Daśabhūmikasūtra* Ch. VI (Rahder's ed. p. 49e-f)
Cittamātraṃ idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukaṃ Yāny apīmāni dvādaśa bhavāṅgāni tathāgatena prabhedaśo vyākhyātāny api sarvāny eva cittasamāśritāni.

56 *Madhyamakāvatāra* p. 182f.

57 Lindtner *Kalyanamitrārāgaṇam* (1986) p. 192; *MRP.* IV. 1.

58 Schmithausen (1979), p. 245.

apparently striking assertion of universal idealism is rather isolated from the body of the text which adopts a more customary realistic ontological note.[59] It is clear then that Bhāvaviveka is probably correct in his interpretation and:

> ... the statement that this whole world is only mind (*cittamātra*) must be interpreted as directed *not* against the existence of real *objects* but against the existence of a substantial self (*ātman*).[60]

What seems particularly surprising to me is that the *Yogācāra* commentators should not have realised this. My thesis is that, of course, they did.

The doctrine of mind-only (*cittamātra*) is true then only from the conventional point of view. For Candrakīrti the mistake made by the *Vijñānavādins* is that they hold this doctrine to be true from the ultimate point of view. Such a position leads to a rejection of the Buddhist teaching and the establishment of full-blown idealism in which the absolute existence of mind is posited. The *Vijñānavādins* have misinterpreted the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*. Candrakīrti re-emphasises this argument by quoting from the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*:

> The person, continuity, aggregates, causal conditions, atoms, primal matter, *Īsvāra*, a maker—I say they are all mind only.[61]

By this quotation Candrakīrti proves that he has scriptural authority for his view that all terms for ultimate principles have no validity from the ultimate point of view. They are all mentally constructed. In this he appears to be following Bhāvaviveka who often appeals to the *Laṅka* in many of his arguments with the *Yogācāra*. At the end of the fourth chapter of *MRP* he quotes from *Laṅka*. II. 123 to the effect that:

> Just as a physician ordains (various kinds of) medicine to each of his suffering patients, thus the Buddha also advocates (the doctrine of) mind only (*cittamātra*) to some living beings.[62]

It must be borne in mind that this position is actually adopted by Nāgārjuna in the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*.

> The teaching of the *Muni* that everything is only mind (*cittamātra*) is intended to remove the fear of fools, it is not to be taken as a true statement.[63]

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59 *Daśa*. (Rahder ed.) 32. 11f.
yasmin vastuni rāgasamyuktaṃ cittaṃ utpadyate, tad vijñānaṃ...

60 Schmithausen *op.cit.*

61 *Madhyamakāvatāra* p. 183 quoting Laṅka. II. 137
pudgalaḥ saṃtatiḥ skandhāḥ pratyayā aṅavas tathā
pradhāṇaṃ īśvaraḥ kartā cittamātraṃ vikalpyate

62 *āture āture yavad bhisag dravyaṃ prayacchati*
buddhā hi tadvat sattvānām cittamātraṃ vadanti vai

63 *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*. v. 27
cittamātram idaṃ sarvam iti yā deśanā muneḥ

It is interesting in this connection to note that there is a text ascribed to Nāgārjuna, by Atīśa in his *Bodhimārgadīpapañjikā*, which performs exactly the same interpretation on the *Daśabhūmika* quotation. This text is the *Mahāyānaviṃśikā*[64] which is generally not included in the list of authentic Nāgārjuna works since it deals with topics usually of more interest to the *Yogācāra*. However since it follows the line adopted by Candrakīrti its authorship by Nāgārjuna may be worth reconsidering.

Having noted Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti's interpretations of mind-only (*cittamātra*) and their subsequent condemnations of the *Vijñānavāda* doctrine, let us now examine the works of a representative of this viewpoint in order to assess the actual position. In fact nothing said by either former authors would be contradicted by Vasubandhu. He opens his autocommentary on the Twenty Stanzas (*Viṃśatikā*) with the assertion that:

> ... in the *Mahāyāna* it has been established that those belonging to the three worlds are only representations of consciousness (*vijñaptimātram*).[65]

This is a clear reference to the *Daśabhūmika*, with the exception that the term mind-only (*cittamātra*) in the former has been replaced by representation-only (*vijñaptimātra*) in the latter. Now T. Kochumuttam[66] has pointed out that the term *traidhātukaṃ* in the above quotation has the adjectival meaning "belonging to the three worlds". As a matter of fact this is the case for the *Daśabhūmika* excerpt also. Kochumuttam argues that the term *traidhātukaṃ*, being adjectival, should qualify a noun. From an examination of Vasubandhu's other works he comes to the conclusion that the noun, or rather nouns, in question are the mind and mental states (*cittacaitta*). Kochumuttam's strongest piece of evidence comes from the *Triṃśikā* of Vasubandhu. In this text we are told that all that is considered as representation only (*vijñaptimātra*) is confined to consciousness and its evolutes (*vijñānapariṇāma*).

> This (threefold) transformation of consciousness is (just) the distinction (between subject and object). What is thus distinguished, does not exist as (subject and object). Therefore all this is representation-only (*vijñaptimātra*).[67]

In other words, due to the transformations of consciousness, in three stages according to Vasubandhu, distinctions arise which take a dichotomous

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uttrāsaparihārthaṃ bālānāṃ sā na tattvataḥ

64 *Mahāyānaviṃśikā*
Tibetan text in Tucci, G. (ed.) *Minor Buddhist Texts* Vol. I Rome (1956) p. 201ff.

65 *Viṃś. vṛtti.* 1 from *Vasubandhu's Vijñaptimatrātāsiddhi* Chatterjee, K.N. (ed.) Varanasi (1980)
mahāyāne traidhātukaṃ vijñaptimātraṃ vyavasthāpyate.

66 Kochumuttam (1978) p. 203.

67 *Triṃś.* 17
vijñānapariṇāmo 'yam vikalpo yad vikalpyate
tena tan nāsti tenedaṃ sarvaṃ vijñaptimātrakaṃ.

form, usually treated in these texts as the division into a false subject/object paring. These *vikalpas* and their concomitants are the representations (*vijñapti*), since the word *vijñapti* is a causative form of *vijñāna* and therefore means "caused by consciousness". *Vikalpas* then are brought about by *vijñāna*.

If we look at the term *vijñānaparināma* more closely we find that *vijñāna* has three modes, the most fundamental (out of which the other two develop) is the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). Of the *ālayavijñāna* we are told that:

> ... it is like a torrent of water which ceases with the attainment of *arhatship*.[68]

In other words the basis to *vijñānaparināma* (i.e. *ālayavijñāna*) comes to an end somewhere towards the conclusion of the Buddhist path. Now if the *Yogācāra* was an idealistic system it would want to hold that, at the attainment of Buddhahood, nothing exists apart from mental phenomena. It is clear from a reading of Vasubandhu that this is not the position that he holds. For him the unenlightened mind is one in which representations (*vijñapti*) are delusively held to be real. Once the mind has freed itself from this state of ignorance it realises the mistakes of its previous state, attains the condition of *gnosis* devoid of thought construction (*nirvikalpajñāna*), and sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*). This is Sthiramati's interpretation of the penultimate stanza of the *Triṃśikā*:

> That indeed is the supramundane knowledge, no mind (*acitta*), without a support. It is the revolution at the basis (*āśraya parāvṛtti*) through the removal of the two-fold wickedness.[69]

Vijñāna is brought to a halt by a revolution at the basis (*āśraya*) which results in the removal of the two wickednesses which are the obstacles of the defilements (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and the obstacles of the knowable (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). The basis is the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). When this is brought to an end supramundane knowledge (*lokottarajñāna*) dawns. Two considerations arise for us here. Firstly, Vasubandhu cannot hold to the sole existence of mind. If he did the idea that the *ālaya* comes to cessation at *arhatship* would entail that he was a nihilist, a view which is naturally strongly proposed by all Buddhists. The second consideration concerns some of Bhāvaviveka's many objections to the *Yogācāra* idea of non-discursive knowledge (*nirvalkajñāna*). In his *Karatalaratna*, "the purpose of which is to help the student generate [supramundane non-discursive knowledge] (*lokottaranirvikalpajñāna*)",[70] we are told that thusness

68 *Triṃś*. 4–5
tacca vartate srotasaughavat.Tasya vyāvrtir arhatve.

69 *Triṃś*. 29
acitto 'nupalambho 'sau jñānaṃ lokottaraṃ ca tat
āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhā dauṣṭhulya hānitaḥ.

(*tathatā*), the ultimate state of things (*dharmānāṃ paramārtha*) "cannot be the object of any kind of *jñāna*".[71] Similarly in the *Prajñāpradīpa* we hear that the *Yogācāra* is unjustified in claiming that thusness can be cognised. In this connection Bhāvaviveka quotes the *Akṣayamatinirdeśasūtra* approvingly:

> What is ultimate truth? Whatever gives no opportunity for thought, let alone for words.[72]

It is with some surprise then that *MRP* has it that a *Mādhyamika*, on the level of *paramārthasatya*,

> ... can certainly generate the transcendental non-discursive cognition (*lokottaranirvikalpajñāna*) by eliminating object-subject (*grāhyagrāhaka*)[73]

This is exactly Vasubandhu's position, and in consequence Bhāvaviveka's objection seems a little misdirected.

If we now return to our original point which was, "how does Vasubandhu interpret the *Daśabhūmika* passage?", we are in a better position to give an answer. The statement that the tripe world is mind-only (*cittamātra*) simply means that for the unenlightened person what he or she takes to be reality is in fact nothing but mind and its concomitants (*cittacaitta*). The enlightened being on the other hand sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*). Sthiramati takes this line of reasoning:

> The above mentioned threefold transformation of consciousness is just thought construction (*vikalpa*). This is nothing but the *citta* and *caittas* belonging to the triple world which have for their object mentally constructed forms. Hence it is said; the *citta* and *caitta* of the tripe world are non-existent imagination.[74]

Kochumuttam seems to be vindicated in his assertion that the nouns qualified by "belonging to the three worlds (*traidhātukaṃ*)" are *citta* and *caitta*. Here we have a situation in which Vasubandhu, Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka are in agreement over the interpretation of the *Daśabhūmika* passage. For all of them it has a provisional meaning in the sense that, while it may be correct to say that for an unenlightened being the world is purely mental, upon the attainment of Buddhahood this could not be said to be so. The mind of the Buddha has been transformed in the sense that it is

70 *KTR*. II. 274c.4–275a.12 cf. Lindtner 'Bhavya's Critique...' (1986) p. 242.

71 *PPD*. cf. Lindtner 'Bhavya's Controversy...' (1984) p. 94–5.

72 *MCB*. II. (1932–3) p. 113.
paramārthasatyam katamat yatra jñānasyāpi apracārah kaḥ punar vādo 'kṣarāṇāṃ cf. Lindtner *ibid.* p. 94 17–8[15]).

73 *MRP*. IV. 6.

74 *Triṃś. bhaṣya*. 17
Yo 'yam vijñānapariṇāmas trividho 'nantaraṃ abhihitaḥ
so 'yam vikalpaḥ adhyāropitārthākārāḥ traidhātukaś
cittācaittā vikalpa ucyate. yathoktam abhūtaparikalpastu
cittācaittās tridhātukāḥ

no longer contaminated by the *vikalpas, prapañcas* etc., which are caused by ignorance. Candrakīrti does not hold that the enlightened mind is conscious of nothing or he would be open to the charge of nihilism. Rather, and this is entirely consistent with his overall stance, he refuses to speculate on the nature of reality. Vasubandhu and Bhāvaviveka are quite similar here. Vasubandhu also distinguishes between an unenlightened state in which one may be justified in saying that mind only or representation only operates, and an enlightened state which is equivalent to a radical transformation of the mind which has now been freed to see reality as it is. There is no hint of idealism here. For Vasubandhu enlightenment is the realisation that, in the unenlightened state, one has been deluded into taking the representations of consciousness to be real. This is the true interpretation of the term *vijñaptimātratā*.

All three authors then give an entirely consistent treatment of the notion of mind only (*cittamātra*) as outlined in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, and we must conclude from this that when Candrakīti refers to the *Vijñānavāda* and Bhāvaviveka to the *Yogācāra*, they are either misinterpreting what the *Yogācārins* have said or, what is more likely given what we have said about the early mutual development of the *Mahāyāna*, are taking issue with a point of view which was never held by exponents of classical interpretation and therefore represents a definite deviation from Buddhist principles. While many authors have chosen to see Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka as being radically opposed to the *Vijñānavāda*, our investigations seem to suggest that, at the level of deep structure, harmony does exist. What differences there are derive predominantly from nuance rather than fundamental doctrinal opposition.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONCEPTION OF TRUTH IN EARLY BUDDHISM

Many of the commonly held presuppositions concerning the distinction between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* revolve around their conceptions of truth. In order to determine the nature of these views we turn our attention to the earliest Buddhist notions of truth (*sacca*; *satya*) before tackling the central issue in the next chapter.

On the surface this is an enormously complex subject since many apparently conflicting formulations are found throughout the development of Buddhist thought. In the earliest strata of the tradition we meet with the notion that truth is unitary.

> There is one truth without a second. People, being confused on this point, claim there to be many truths.[1]

Are we to assume that the idea of truth (*satya*) being one should be understood in the sense given it by a system such as the *Advaita Vedānta* of Śaṅkara? Is this *satya* an ontologically unitary absolute of the monistic variety? It seems unlikely. Jayatilleke has an alternative theory. He argues[2] that in the context of the discussion taking place in the *Sutta Nipāta*, it is more likely that when the Buddha talks about truth being unitary he actually means that statements should not contradict one another. In other words, if someone makes a series of statements on a particular matter it is important that they should all point in the same general direction, or rather that they should cohere. Someone whose statements do not meet this condition may be dismissed as someone who does not expound a unitary truth. There is nothing uncommon in this procedure in the history of Buddhist thought. It is one of the primary methods employed by Nāgārjuna in his attempt in *MMK* to discredit potential opponents and is the basis of the *prasaṅga* method of reasoning extolled by Candrakīrti. If an opponent's position can be shown to be internally inconsistent the force can rapidly be taken out of his attack. This does not mean however that the *Prāsaṅgika* himself must accept the fact of a unitary (in the sense of absolute) truth. He merely insists that any series of statements must conform to a coherence theory of truth in order to be taken seriously. This particular aspect of the Buddhist truth formulation then is entirely independent of

1 *Sn.* 884
ekaṃ hi saccaṃ na dutīyam atthi
yasmin pajāno vivade pajānaṃ
nānā te saccāni sayaṃ thunanti
tasmā na ekaṃ samanā vadanti

2 Jayatilleke (1963) p. 353.

any ontological speculation since it rests solely on the non-contradictory nature of statements.

Other concepts of truth are also met within the early literature. We are told that it is possible to entertain both true and false notions with regard to facts and that such notions may be proved or disproved by recourse to pseudo-empirical methods. Thus:

> When in fact there is a next world, the belief occurs to me that there is no next world, that would be a false belief ... When in fact there is a next world, the belief occurs to me that there is a next world, that would be a true belief.[3]

It is clear that this is a primitive correspondence theory of truth. Statements which do not accord with the way things really are must be false, while statements which are true conform to the facts. This is the sense of the Sanskrit term *yathābhūtam*—as it is. If something is said to be *yathābhūtam* it must be true for it corresponds with reality (*bhūta*). Again there is no question that simply because something is true by this criterion we must conclude that reality is a unitary absolute. Furthermore there is no particular conflict between this correspondence theory and the statement already quoted from the *Sutta Nipāta*. The former may still be seen to yield a unitary truth in the sense that all true statements may now be said to cohere with the true state of things.

Another important distinction which is made in the Pali canon, which we shall soon see has a direct bearing on the conception of truth in later Buddhism, is that between two different types of *suttas*; i.e. those with a direct meaning (*nītattha*) and those with an indirect meaning (*neyyattha*). Thus:

> There are these two who misrepresent the *Tathāgata*. Which two? He who represents a *sutta* of indirect meaning as a *sutta* of direct meaning and he who represents a *sutta* of direct meaning as a *sutta* of indirect meaning.[4]

Now the Pali canon itself gives no information on how to identify a passage of either direct or indirect intention, and further there exists no positive evidence which would lead to the placing of one *sutta* in a more exalted position that the other. It seems that the *nītattha/neyyattha* distinction is basically one with a pedagogical purpose. One kind of *sutta* being suitable for a person of a particular disposition, or at a certain stage in the path, the other for someone else. The strictures contained in the above quota-

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3 *M.* i. 402–3
santaṃ yeva kho pana paraṃ lokaṃ; na'tthi paro loko ti'ssa diṭṭhi hoti, sā'ssa hoti michhādiṭṭhi santaṃ yeva kho pana paraṃ lokaṃ : atthi paro loko ti'ssa diṭṭhi hoti, sā'ssa hoti sammā diṭṭhi

4 *A.* i. 60
dve'me tathāgataṃ abbhācikkhanti katame dve? yo ca neyyatthaṃ suttantaṃ nītattho suttanto ti dīpeti; yo ca nītatthaṃ suttantaṃ neyyattho suttanto ti dīpeti

tion are aimed merely against mixing up teaching materials. They support the use of appropriate teachings for the appropriate kind of disciple.

It is actually the Pali commentarial literature which makes the distinction between *nītattha* and *neyyattha suttas* one of degree. Since these commentaries were written some time after the rise of the *Mahāyāna* one may suspect a certain amount of cross-fertilisation. Be that as it may, it appears that in these writings *suttas* of indirect meaning (*neyyattha*) are placed in a subordinate position to those of direct meaning (*nītattha*). This is because, while the latter are deemed to be true from the ultimate point of view (*paramattha*), the former are only conventionally so (*sammuti*). The Pali canon contains no passage in which statements of ultimate and conventional meaning are contrasted and we may suspect that this distinction is a commentarial development. However there is little doubt that such an idea exists implicitly in the *Abhidharma* literature, even though there may be no explicit formulation. The *Abhidharma* recognises the fact that, while conventionally language about persons (*puggala*) etc., may be understood and acted upon by the ordinary person, the psycho-physical continuum is in reality nothing but a mirage caused by the constant interplay of countless impermanent, insubstantial, and unsatisfactory elements (*dharma*). It looks clear that the Pali commentarial literature draws on the *Abhidhārmika* tradition in its attempt to make the distinction between sayings of indirect meaning and those of direct meaning, for we are told:

> A *sutta* of the form "there is one individual, O monks", etc., is a *sutta* of indirect meaning ... Here although the perfectly Enlightened One speaks of "there is one person, O monks", etc., its sense has to be inferred since there is no individual from the ultimate point of view ... One should speak of a *sutta* of direct meaning (as of the form), "this is impermanent, unsatisfactory and devoid of a soul".[5]

There seems to be a case for the view that the concept of two levels of Buddhist truth is a fairly late development in the evolution of doctrine. As we have already said, the early texts tend to speak of only one truth, or rather one interconnected series of statements which together may be taken as expounding the truth. This interlocking formulation results in a coherent vision of reality as such and corresponds with the Buddha's teaching (*dharma*). While it could be maintained that it is possible to hold to a two-level truth doctrine, in the sense that everything conforming to *dharma* must be true while everything contrary to it must be false, this is not what is generally meant by two levels of truth in the Pali commentarial

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5 *Manorathapūranī* [*AA*]. ii. 118
ekapuggalo bhikkhave...ti evarūpo suttanto neyyattho nāma. ettha hi kiñcāpi sammāsambuddhena ekapuggalo bhikkhave ti ādi vuttaṃ paramatthato pana puggalo nāma n'atthī ti evaṃ assa attho netabbo va hoti... Nītatthan ti aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ anattā ti evaṃ kathitatthaṃ

work or in the writings of the *Mahāyāna*. In fact both of the two truths are held, under certain circumstances, to possess veracity, though it is clear that the parameters which limit one do not necessarily apply to the other.

If we return to the *nītattha/neyyattha* distinction of the early literature we notice again that no explicit value judgement has been placed on the two forms of teaching. The distinction merely refers to the appropriateness of their use in the pedagogical process. How then did the position arise in which the Pali commentators felt the need to introduce a novel formulation in which, for the first time, the teaching of direct meaning becomes linked with ultimacy, while the indirect teaching is relegated to a position of inferiority? It is more than probable that in the period marked by the rise of the *Mahāyāna* and the development of the schools of the *Abhidhārmikas* a need was recognised to systematise, to a degree that had not been done before, some of the many seemingly conflicting references to truth in an already burgeoning ocean of doctrine. This would probably have been due to the fact that a coherent *dharma* needed to conform with the influential *Sutta Nipāta* statement that "truth is one without a second". At the same time it would have protected Buddhist doctrine from the criticism of opponents. As we have noted, the *Abhidhārmikas* promoted the idea that while persons, trees, etc., possess a conventional reality, only the *dharmas* underlying these objects are true from the absolute point of view. It was more or less inevitable therefore, that a systematiser would come along and graft this idea on to the *nītattha/neyyatha* concept and arrive at a synthesis not unlike that presented by the commentator of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.

It is impossible to say who was responsible for this new departure but from approximately the fifth century AD it becomes an important doctrinal element. Candrakīrti[6] gives a reference to a canonical work of unknown date, the *Āryākṣayamatisūtra*, in which *sūtras* of indirect meaning (*neyārtha*) are said to deal with conventional ideas such as living things (*jīva*), souls (*puruṣa*) and persons (*pudgala*), while *sūtras* of direct meaning (*nītārtha*) concern doctrines such as selflessness (*anātman*). It is possible that Nāgārjuna regards the *Akṣayamatinirdeśa* as the canonical source of the *neyārtha/nītārtha* distinction in his *Acintyastava*.[7]

Asaṅga, in his *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, classifies truth (*satya*) in ten ways. At the top of the list he says that "truth is one in the sense of being non-contradictory",[8] while seemingly contradicting such an assertion immediately afterwards by saying that "truth is two-fold as conventional truth

6 *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās de Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā de Candrakīrti* la Vallée Poussin (ed.) p. 43.4 and n. 2–3.

7 *Acintyastava* 56–57 cf. Lindtner *Nagarjuniana* p. 158–9.

8 *Bodhisattvabhūmi* Wogihara (ed.) (1908) p. 292
avitathārtheṇa tāvad ekaṃ eva satyaṃ na dvitīyam asti.

and ultimate truth".[9] While noting that Asaṅga must surely have realised the variance between these two statements, we will wait until a more appropriate stage in our argument to see how he resolved such obvious difficulties. The conflict between a one truth doctrine and a two truth formulation was an obvious stumbling block. The Buddha had insisted from the very beginning of his teaching that the dharma consisted of Four Noble Truths. How could this be consistent with the ideas expressed in the *Sutta Nipāta*? The *Vibhāṣā* asks the same question,

> If there are four truths, why did the *Bhagavat* say that there is only one truth?[10]

It goes on to answer that there is no inconsistency. The way that this is done supports the idea that a concept of a unique truth should not be taken in any absolute sense. It should, on the contrary, merely refer to coherence within a matrix of doctrinal formulations. The *Vibhāṣā* seeks support from Pārśva and his contention that the one-truth concept is the only correct interpretation of the four-noble truths. It seems that many heterodox teachers had taken each of the noble truths to refer to a number of different attainments. To take an example from the *Vibhāṣā*,[11] many heretical teachers are said to confuse the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*) with the four formless attainments (*ārūpyasamāpatti*), i.e.

(i) The stage of infinite space (*ākāśānantyāyatana*)
(ii) The stage of infinite consciousness (*vijñānānantyāyatana*)
(iii) The stage of nothingness (*ākiṃcanyāyatana*)
(iv) The stage of neither consciousness nor no-consciousness (*naivasaṃjñānāsaṃjñāyatana*).

However none of these attainments actually represent deliverance (*vimukti*). Rather they are forms of existence in the non-material sphere (*ārūpyabhava*). This being the case, when the Buddha taught the truth of cessation (*nirodhasatya*) he was referring only to the one true deliverance (*vimukti*), in other words *nirvāṇa*. The same technique is used by the *Vibhāṣā* to demonstrate that the other three noble truths can be correctly interpreted in one, unique and coherent manner and the attempt to segment any of them is non-Buddhist.

Saṃghabhadra puts the whole problem of the one and the four into perspective. In his commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, the *Abhidharmanyāyānusāraśāstra*, written from a *Vaibhāsika* standpoint, and making particular reference to the one-truth doctrine of *Sn.* 884, he maintains:

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9 *ibid.*
dvividhaṃ satyaṃ saṃvṛtisatyaṃ paramārthasatyañ ca

10 cf. la Vallée Poissin, L. 'Documents D'Abhidharma. Les Deux, les quatre, les trois vérités. Extraits de la Vibhāṣā et du Kośa de Saṃghabhadra' *MCB.* 5 (1937) p. 161.

11 *ibid.* p. 162.

> The expression 'one-truth' indicates a general manner of proclaiming the truths in the holy teachings (*āryādeśanāśāsana*).[12]

What he means here is that there is no real dispute over the question of the four and the one since the expression "one-truth" merely refers to the correct and consistent interpretation of the four noble truths, and all other Buddhist doctrines for that matter. This is a general manner of understanding which is available only to those far-advanced on the Buddhist path. This interpretation stands in conformity with the true intention of the Buddha when he formulated his doctrine. Following on from this particular problem, Saṃghabhadra tries to reconcile the doctrine of the unity of truth with that of the two truth concept. For him the correct interpretation of the noble truths (*āryasatya*) corresponds with ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). In other words Saṃghabhadra implicitly links the "one-truth" of *Sn*. 884 with *paramārthasatya*. With regard to conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), we are told that it is connected with the manner of worldly speaking (*lokajanapadanirukti*), and that such discourse is itself based on false and vulgar designations. It is not the concern of the enlightened. They no longer have recourse to such conventions, and have no dispute with conventional truth. However the method of discourse implicated in these truth formulations prevents the possibility of pointing out ultimate truth. Put more simply Saṃghabhadra holds that *saṃvṛtisatya* is an inherently unsatisfactory, but nevertheless the best possible, means of articulating *paramārthasatya*. For this reason *saṃvṛtisatya* is entirely dependent on *paramārthasatya*. The duality of this truth formulation is merely apparent and the two-truth doctrine becomes quite compatible with *Sn*. 884, or as our text says:

> As the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) comprises the ultimate (*paramārtha*) there is no contradiction with the unity of truth taught by the great sage (*mahāmūni*).[13]

The *Vibhāṣā* follows a slightly different track by trying to find agreement between the two-truth and four-truth formulations, but in the end comes to the same conclusions as Saṃghabhadra. It mentions[14] four separate theories concerning supposed connections between these various doctrines. The first connects the first two noble truths (*duḥkhasatya* and *samudayasatya*) with the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) since these two deal with mundane concepts, while the third and fourth of the noble truths (*nirodhasatya* and *mārgasatya*) connect with a supramundane reality (*lokottaratattva*) and are ultimately true (*paramārthasatya*). The second opinion places the first three noble truths within the *saṃvṛtisatya* leaving only

12 *ibid*. p. 181.
13 *ibid*. p. 183.
14 *ibid*. p. 163f.

the *mārgasatya* as ultimately true, since according to this theory only the fourth truth is uncontaminated by mundane designations. The third opinion makes all the noble truths merely of conventional application, while the fourth, said to be associated with P'ing-kia, allows the noble truths to be both *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha* depending on one's point of view. L. de la Vallée Poussin[15] has pointed out that other theories were also current which differed from the four enumerated in the *Vibhāṣā*. However, what is clear in all of these attempts at synthesis is a deep seated desire by many Buddhist authors to reconcile the apparently contradictory statements of the Buddha concerning the nature of truth.

The *Vibhāṣā* presents these various attempts in a light which shows that they are not entirely satisfactory solutions to the problem. They may, in a sense, be considered as cul-de-sacs in the development of a comprehensive solution to this knotty problem. The *Vibhāṣā* does however present its own solution, which we have already noted corresponds quite clearly with that of Saṃghabhadra. Responding to the objection that, "If there is only one truth, why then establish two truths?", the author equates the one truth with *paramārthasatya*. He goes on to elaborate a kind of correspondence theory. Reality itself transcends the construction of truth formulations. It is, however, the basis of two different points of view. The first point of view is not entirely accurate since, though it takes reality as its starting point, it is affected by many subsidiary factors associated with worldly convention. It departs from the true state of affairs but is recognised as truth in conventional discourse. This is conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*). The second point of view is uncontaminated by worldly convention and conforms with reality as it truly is (*yathābhūtam*). This is the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). Now, since these two judgements have their roots in a world independent of the processes of thought the *Vibhāṣā* reasons, quite justifiably, that it is entirely consistent to maintain one onto-logical truth. It is this world, independent of thought, which gives rise to the two-truth formulations, one of which is in total correspondence (i.e. *paramārthasatya*), the other being less so (i.e. *saṃvṛtisatya*). *Paramārthasatya* then is completely congruent with reality (*tattva*) while the *saṃvṛtisatya*, taking reality as its basis and being dependent on *paramārthasatya*, is not fully congruent. Nevertheless it must be appreciated that conventional truth is not entirely devoid of veracity.

If we may now summarise a little, it becomes clear that while many Buddhist authors may have introduced confusion in their treatment of the miscellaneous truth doctrines attributed to the Buddha, there is a perfectly satisfactory way of explaining an overall coherence. In the first place all the evidence points to the Buddha's identification as a realist. There is a real world external to and independent of the processes of mundane

15 *ibid.* p. 165.

thought. This reality is the ontological basis upon which two epistemic orientations have their foundation. The first epistemic orientation is dependent not only on its prime datum (i.e. reality) but is influenced by thought constructions which lead to a distorted picture of things. The second is the complete identification with and accurate reflection of reality and is available only to those who, having progressed sufficiently along the Buddhist path, have eradicated the influences of convention. In other words, one ontological truth (i.e. reality (*tattva*)) gives rise to two epistemic truths, i.e. the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*). The Buddhist teaching (*dharma*) is itself a body of disparate doctrines such as the four noble truths, the theory of *dharmas*, the three marks of existence, etc. which cohere into an overall picture with the explicit intention of providing an antidote to the conventional way of seeing things. It eventually leads to the realisation of ultimate truth. The *dharma* then, while it may appear contradictory to a superficial examination, in fact has a coherent unity which it points towards the true nature of reality.

This leads us back to the *nītattha/neyyattha* distinction. There is no doubt that, if what we have said above is correct, these two categories of discourse cannot ultimately be at variance with one another. If this were so we could not talk of the Buddhist doctrine as being internally coherent. It is clear therefore, that the Pali commentators were adopting a peculiar tactic when they allied *nītattha* with *sammuti* and *neyyattha* with *paramattha*, particularly since there is no basis for such a development in the Canon itself. Furthermore, analysis of these commentarial writings reveals that, in the hands of their authors, the terms *sammuti* and *paramattha* are used in a sense which differs somewhat from that used by both the *Mahāyāna* and the *Abhidharma*. In the Pali commentarial treatment of the two kinds of truth there is no implication that one is actually superior to the other:

> The Perfectly Enlightened One, the best of teachers, spoke two truths; the conventional and the absolute—one does not come across a third; a conventional statement is true because of convention and an absolute statement is true as (disclosing) the true characteristics of things.[16]

More importantly both "truths" are equally efficient in bringing the auditor to an understanding of the true state of affairs since they differ not so much in degree, but rather in the way that two foreign languages differ. They both express the same meaning though in ways designed to suit different individuals.

> Just as if there were a teacher, who explains the meaning of the Three *Vedas* and is versed in the regional languages; to those who would understand the meaning

16 *AA*. i. 95
duve saccāni akkhāsi sambuddho vadataṃ varo sammutiṃ paramatthañ ca tatiyaṃ n'ūpalabbhati saṃketavacanaṃ saccaṃ lokasammutikāraṇā paramatthavacanaṃ saccaṃ dhammānaṃ bhūtakāraṇā.

> if he spoke in the Tamil language, he explains it in the Tamil language and to another who would understand (if he spoke in) the Āndhra language, he speaks in that language.[17]

This suggests that:

> But whether they use conventional speech or absolute speech, they speak what is true, what is factual and not false.[18]

According to this view either form of teaching is capable of leading a person to the realisation of the nature of things and we must conclude that this particular usage of the terms conventional (*sammuti*) and ultimate (*paramattha*) is different from that adopted by the rest of the Buddhist tradition. In our case they are merely used as synonyms for the two forms of teaching recorded in the discourses of the Buddha. One could almost say that, in this usage, the only difference between the two is that sayings of direct meaning (*nītattha*) are regarded as absolute (*paramattha*) because of the Buddhist technical jargon they employ, while those of indirect meaning (*neyyattha*) are conventional (*sammuti*) and reliant on customary language.

What is commonly held, principally in the *Abhidharma*, to be the distinction between *paramārtha* and *saṃvṛtisatya*? There can be no doubt that the explicit distinction is entirely absent from the *Theravāda* tradition. This does not necessarily mean that there is no trace of such a doctrine in early Buddhism as a whole. We are told in the *Milindapañha* that the person Nāgasena is merely a name and only conventionally true (*sammuti*), for from the ultimate (*paramattha*) point of view there is no person to be got hold of.[19] Light can be shed on such a theory by reference to Saṃghabhadra and his attempt to expound the doctrines of the *Vaibhāṣikas*. His view is that existence may be subsumed under two headings, i.e. substantial existence (*dravyasat*) and designated being (*prajñaptisat*). The former may be considered as a primary form of existence, the latter in consequence, being secondary. Saṃghabhadra gives a number of examples of what it means to constitute each of these classes of entity. Primary existents are

17 *AA*. 1. 95
tatrāyam upamā: yathā hi desabhāsākusalo tiṇṇaṃ vedānaṃ atthasamvaṇṇako ācariyo ye damilabhāsāya vutte atthaṃ jānan ti tesaṃ damilabhāsāya ācikkhati ye andhabhāsādisu aññatarāya tesaṃ tāya bhāsāya

18 *Kathāvatthuppakaraṇaṭṭhakathā* p. 36
te sammutikathaṃ kathentā pi saccaṃ eva sabhāvam eva amusā'va kathenti. paramatthaṃ kathentā pi saccam eva sabhāvam eva amusā'va kathenti

19 *Miln.* p. 37
sādhu kho tvavṃ mahārāja ratham jānāsi, evam eva kho mahārāja mayham'pi kese ca paṭicca lome ca paṭicca pe matthalungañ ca paṭicca rūpañ ca paṭicca vedanañ ca paṭicca sankhāre ca paṭicca viññānañ ca paṭicca nāgaseno ti sankhā samaññā paññatti vohāro nāmamattaṃ pavattati, paramatthato pan'ettha puggalo'nūpalabbhati

considered to be sense-data such as form and sensation, while an object like a chair would of necessity be a secondary existent, depending for its being on primary existents (*dravyasat*). As Williams says:

> Secondary existence is the sort of existence pertaining to entities which can be further analysed and which are therefore conglomerates composed out of primary existents.[20]

Returning to the *Milindapañha* reference then, it becomes clear that "Nāgasena" must be regarded as merely a secondary existent (*prajñaptisat*). He may only be regarded as conventionally true (*saṃvṛti*). This does not mean that he is devoid of an underlying substantial existence (*dravyasat*), a primary nature, that may exist from the ultimate point of view (*paramārtha*), since as Williams again notes:

> A secondary existent is an existent solely because it is an intentional and primarily linguistic referent. But primary existents too are linguistic referents for the *Sarvāstivāda*, the point of difference being that the secondary existent is dependent and therefore has no self-essence, in its own right it is nothing, that is, it lacks a uniquely individuating description.[21]

It seems that for the *Vaibhāṣikas* the real distinction between a *dravyasat* entity and a *prajñaptisat* entity is that the ontological status of the former is more certain than that of the latter. One could say that a *prajñaptisat* entity such as a "person" refers to something with reality merely in the conventional sense. It is empirically real, but it can be analysed into more fundamental existents which cannot be broken down any further. What the *Vaibhāṣikas* seem to be getting at is the notion that when an external object is presented to consciousness the primary cognitive content is rapidly turned into a linguistic form for the purpose of conventional discourse. The mental activity which causes this transformation is identified by another *Sarvāstivādin*, Subhagupta in his *Bāhyārthasiddhikārikā*,[22] as a thought constructive consciousness (*vikalpajñāna*) which superimposes unity, and hence a convenient linguistic label, upon a series of separate primary elements. For this school of Buddhists it seems that the distinction between *prajñaptiṣat* and *dravyasat* entities is parallel to that of conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) and ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). What is not clear is whether or not *dravyasat* entities can be articulated

20 Williams (1981) p. 247

21 *ibid.* p. 249.

22 *Subhagupta, "Bahyārtha Siddhi Kārikā"* edited by N.A. Shatri
v. 36
blos yis rtag tu rgyun chags daṅ
rigs mthun pa la 'dzin mod kyi
rnam par rtog pa'i shes pa yis
de gcig ñid du nges pa byed
cf. *Bulletin of Tibetology* 4/2 (1967) p. 1–96

linguistically, or in other words whether it is possible to speak of ultimate truth. In another article Williams tells us:

> There is nothing for the *Sarvāstivāda* which has no name, although there may be situations such as *samādhi* which are of a nature that precludes utterance. The inability to name does not render something ineffable, and this incoherence of ineffability is found not only in the *Sarvāstivāda* texts but also in those of the *Theravāda* and seems to be a notable feature of *Abhidharma* Buddhism. Followers of the older schools seem to have been united in holding that all existents can be named. Buddhaghosa observed that there is nothing which escapes being named, for if we say that a thing is ineffable then that thing is thereby named as 'ineffable'.[23]

This quotation supports Williams' earlier contention,[24] and simply stated conveys the idea that experience, even from the ultimate point of view, can be successfully articulated. His basic position seems to be that someone far advanced on the path has awareness of the contents of the world independent of thought. He or she "sees" the underlying substantial entities (*dravyasat*), or prime existents. He views the *dharmas*. As such his language will refer to the *dravyasat* level. He will be able to successfully articulate his experiences, though one may suppose that his use of language, conforming to the specifications of the *Abhidharmic* system, will be necessarily technical. In other words he is likely to list the prime constituents of a chair rather than report that "it is a chair". The corollary to this is that an ignorant person, not trained in "seeing" *dharmas* will indulge in illegitimate thought construction and use conventional discourse to describe the secondary (*prajñaptisat*) entities which he inevitably experiences. The *Sarvāstivādin* position comes down to the following: all known entities whether primary or secondary can be referred to linguistically. Denotation will be of a more or less technical nature, and will reveal, particularly to one adept in "bringing *dharmas* into view", the level of insight of the speaker. The use of conventional discourse may reveal a speaker as experiencing a secondary level of reality, while someone using *Abhidharmic* jargon will be assumed to have penetrated to the primary.

The outline above clearly coheres with the *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction already discussed in which talk of *dharmic* constituents of reality constitutes an unambiguous message from the Buddha, while conventional discourse is held as merely implicit and hence requiring further orthodox interpretation in order to reach full intelligibility. This doctrine appears to be quite interchangeable with *Sarvāstivādin* notions. Language of substantial entities (*dravyasat*) is synonymous with talk of an explicit or direct intention (*nītārtha*), while language of designated entities (*prajñaptisat*) will only have an indirect (*neyārtha*) sense.

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23 Williams (1980) p. 2..

24 *supra* n.21.

The section of the *Milindapañha*, previously quoted, clearly relegates discourse on "Nāgasena" to what is conventionally true and we have already stated that this should not lead us to the conclusion that "Nāgasena" is totally non-existent; i.e. that no substantial existent or existents underlie the name. However it is not at all clear from the text whether there is a possibility of referring to the *dravyasat* entities that presumably comprise Nāgasena.

The *Mahāyāna*, on the whole, is clearer on this point. In the writings of the *Mahāyāna* relevant to our investigations there is a consensus that the sphere of discourse does not touch the true nature of things. Candrakīrti will be a case in point. For him names (*abhidhāna*) and *prajñaptisat* entities are one and the same thing. They are ultimately non-existent.[25] This seems a development distinct from that of the *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction. Words no longer sometimes refer to a true state of affairs and sometimes to a distorted reality. In this view words themselves, irrespective of the precise ontological status of the thing to which they refer, must all be taken on the same level. A word denoting a *dharmic* constituent has no greater truth value than the word "Nāgasena". The net of language has become a meta-system thrown over the world, but standing apart from it. This net is inherently unsatisfactory in explicating things. One may say that language becomes a metaphor for reality.

This doctrine seems to be quite at odds with the *prajñaptisat/dravyasat* distinction of the *Sarvāstivāda*. It is however at the root of Nāgārjuna's contention that the Buddha never uttered a word.

> All mental perceptions (*upalambha*) are (basically) quiescent, free from dichotomisation (*prapañca*) and at peace. No *dharma* has anywhere been taught by the Buddha of anything.[26]

Candrakīrti's idea that *nirvāṇa* cannot be commented on by the saints (*ārya*) follows on from this. However the view that reality cannot be properly articulated may not be an invention of the *Madhyamaka*. In the unanswered or inexpressible (*avyākaṭa*) questions of the Pali *Cūla Māluṅkyasutta*[27] we meet with the Buddha's refusal to answer on the grounds that any response to fourteen philosophical questions:

(i) Is the world eternal, or not, or both or neither?
(ii) Is the world finite, or infinite, or both or neither?
(iii) Does the *Tathāgata* exist after death, or not, or both, or neither?

25 *Madhyamakāvatāra* p. 139.16
mngon par brjod pa ni btags pa'i
rnam par 'dzin pa'i phyir te

26 *MMK.* xxv. 24
sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivaḥ
na kvacit kasyacit kaścid dharmo buddhena deśitaḥ

27 *M.* i. 426–432.

(iv) Is the soul identical to the body or not?

would result in misleading consequences. The *Abhidhārmika* interpretation of this refusal to answer would seem to be that by accepting the premises of these questions the Buddha would be giving credence to a view that concepts such as "world", "*Tathāgata*", "soul" etc. exist in reality rather than being, composite entities made up of more fundamental constituents. Another interpretation however is possible. We have already noted that Nāgārjuna makes implicit reference to the *Brahmajālasutta* in *MMK* xxvii. Now this *sutta* makes the fundamental point that in all cases the Buddha wishes to avoid dogmatic speculation (*diṭṭhivāda*) since such activity inevitably leads to the participants being caught up in the "net" of Brahma (*Brahmajāla*). It seems that the Buddha not only explicitly refused to answer the fourteen *avyākaṭa* questions, but also implicitly refuses to answer any questions of the type "Is it true that ...?" If he were to give a yes or no answer he would be guilty of the crime of dogmatism (*diṭṭhivāda*) which he repudiates in others. The Buddha therefore treads a middle path (*madhyama pratipad*) when it comes to speculation of a metaphysical nature. He avoids the extremes of eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*) and nihilism (*ucchedavāda*). This does not of course imply that the Buddha taught a sort of golden mean with respect to truth. As Jayatilleke comments:

> Logically there is no reason why truth should lie in the middle rather than in one of the two extremes ... The problem, however, is whether it was dogmatically assumed that the truth must lie in the middle or on the other hand whether it was considered that the truth in the above instances happened to lie between two extremes. The second appears to be the more plausible alternative in the light of the facts.[28]

There is much to commend what Jayatilleke is saying but one must also bear in mind the fact that while truth may occupy the mid ground between the two extremes, it is also entirely dissimilar since it is inarticulable. The two extremes are dogmatic theories, the Buddhist "truth" is not.

> The *Tathāgata*, O Vaccha, is free from all theories ... Therefore the *Tathāgata* has attained deliverance and is free from attachment, inasmuch as all imaginings, or agitations, or false notions concerning a self, or anything pertaining to a self, have perished, have faded away, have ceased, have been given up or relinquished.[29]

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28 Jayatilleke (1963) p. 360.

29 *M.* i. 486
diṭṭhigatanti kho vaccha apanītametaṃ tathāgatassa diṭṭhaṃ h' etaṃ vaccha tathāgatena: iti rūpam, iti rū-passa samudayo, iti rūpassa atthagamo; iti vedanā, iti vedanāya samudayo, iti vedanāya atthagamo; iti saññā, iti saññāya samudayo, iti saññāya atthagamo; iti saṅkhārā, iti saṅkhārānaṃ samudayo, iti saṅkhārānaṃ atthagamo; iti viññāṇaṃ, iti viññāṇassa samudayo, iti viññāṇassa atthagamo ti. tasmā tathāgato sabbamaññitānaṃ sabbamathitānaṃ sabba-ahiṃkāra-mamiṃkāra-mānānusayānaṃ khayā virāgā nirodhā cāgā paṭinissaggā anupādā vimutto ti vadāmīti.

While it cannot be denied that the Buddha did speak a great deal about all manner of things, the importance of the "silence of the Buddha" doctrine is to put a certain provisional significance on his statements. The Buddha's teaching is merely a raft which should be abandoned when the stream has been crossed. It is not intended to have any ultimate value. As we are told in the *Kaccāyanavāda*,[30] (incidentally the only *sutta* of the *Tripiṭaka* to be explicitly mentioned by Nāgārjuna) it is impossible to formulate statements without appeal to the "it is" (*atthitam*) and "it is not" (*nātthitam*) duality. Reliance on language inevitably involves these two extremes. As the Buddha's teaching is said to be the middle position between the two it may be possible to infer that, in this particular strata of the canon at least, the *dharma* is ultimately inexpressible. This position corresponds well with the linguistic theories previously assigned to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti.

The early Buddhist tradition then shows a certain tension with regard to its notion of the meaningful bounds of language. On one side we recognise that two levels of discourse are held to be possible; a lower, worldly usage and a higher, accessible to those who "see" the world, of ultimate *dharmic* realities. On the other hand there appears to be tacit approval of the fact, that when it comes to matters of ultimate importance, language, by its very nature, leads the seeker for truth away from his goal. While recognising the pragmatic value of language, this second outlook suggests that language itself is so infected with dichotomies which always implicate it in a constructed world picture, that it is an unworthy vessel for the articulation of truth. In the light of this tension it is hardly surprising that the idea of a reality entirely free from the dichotomies inherent in language would eventually arise in Buddhist thought. It is similarly unsurprising that an author like Nāgārjuna, who repudiates the doctrine of *dharmasvābhava* and therefore has no need for a level of discourse which articulates *dharmic* realities, would adopt the kind of position with regard to language, which he does. Although the precise historical route by which the tension was overcome is not so far established, and one would be foolish to be too specific, there are important indications that a provisional solution was being considered by two Buddhist groups—the *Prajñaptivādins*, and the followers of Harivarman.

We possess an important indication that such a doctrine may have played a major role in the teachings of the *Mahāsāṃghikas*[31]. It has already

30 *S.* ii. 17
dvayanissito khvāyam, kaccāyana, loko yebhuyyena atthitañ ceva natthitañca ... sabbaṃ atthīti kho, kaccāyana, ayam eko anto; sabbaṃ natthīti ayaṃ dutīyo anto; ete te, kaccāyana, ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammam deseti.

31 cf. Bareau, A. 'Trois Traités sur les Sectes Bouddhiques Attribués a Vasumitra, Bhavya et Vinītadeva. Part 1.' *Journal Asiatique* (1954) p. 237.

been noted that designation (*prajñapti*) was considered to be a feature of conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) in the *Milindapañha*. In his *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*, Vasumitra[32] maintains that the *Mahāsāṃghikas* very quickly split into nine sub-groups, one of which is called the *Prajñaptivāda*. In the subsequent discussion of the doctrines of these sub-groups Vasumitra tells us that, for the *Prajñaptivādins*, all conditioned things (i.e. secondary existents [*prajñaptisat*]) are unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*) since they are merely designations (*prajñapti*).

> Les compositions (*saṃskāra*), qui sont des assemblages (*sāmagrī*) evoluant en interdépendance, sont nommées douleur par simple désignation (*prajñapti*). Il n'ya pas d'homme agent (*puruṣa kartṛ*).[33]

Paramārtha (557–569 AD), the Chinese translator and commentator, tells us that the main point of controversy which led to the split between the *Mahāsāṃghikas* and the *Sthāviras* was over the status of the Buddha's teaching. For the former the exposition of various Buddhist doctrines is merely a heuristic device, while for the latter doctrinal concepts such as *nirvāṇa* etc. are denotative.

> L'école *Mahāsāṃghika* soutenait que la transmigration (*saṃsāra*) et le *Nirvāṇa* sont tous deux les dénominations fictives (*prajñapti*); l'école *Sthāvirīya* soutenait qu'ils sont tous deux réels (*dravya*).[34]

Paramārtha goes on to say that the sub-group *Bahuśrutika-Vibhajyavāda* (*Prajñaptivāda*) derives its authority from the teachings of *Mahā-Kātyāyāna*. This is interesting since it is precisely the *Kaccāyanasutta* of the *Tripiṭaka* that Nāgārjuna quotes with approval. We have seen that this *sutta* may be interpreted as promoting the view that the Buddha's teaching is essentially incommunicable owing to the fact that statements about reality inevitably rely on the false dichotomy of "it is" (*atthitam*) and "it is not" (*nātthitam*). Since *Kaccāyana*, the *Prajñaptivādins*, and Nāgārjuna, do have important doctrinal features in common one cannot help speculating as to whether there was a direct line of transmission from one to another. Be that as it may, Paramārtha holds that for the *Prajñaptivāda*, the Buddha's teaching is of provisional importance since it has to rely on *prajñapti*:

> ... Ceci a été énoncé par le Buddha entant que denomination fictive (*prajñapti*), ceci est l'enseignement réel du Buddha; ceci est vérité absolute (*paramārtha-satya*), ceci est vérité contingent (*saṃvṛtisatya*).[35]

We seem to be moving towards the fully developed position of the *Mahāyāna* concerning the doctrine of two truths. However before we do so, let us briefly examine one further lead.

32 *ibid.*
33 *ibid.* p. 247.
34 *Demiéville* (1931–2) p. 33.
35 *ibid.* p. 50.

Demiéville tells us that the diverse processes which led to the establishment of the various groups associated with the *Mahāsāṃghikas* resulted in what he calls "un syncretisme de *Hīnayāna* et de *Mahāyāna*".[36] What is particularly of note is the fact that one of the texts to come out of this tradition is the *Satyasiddhiśāstra* of Harivarman. This is an *Abhidharmic* document, the only surviving version being Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of 412 AD.[37] According to Paramārtha, Harivarman was a follower of the *Bahuśrutikas (Prajñaptivāda?)* and so must have accepted some distinction between the two truths. Now the *Satyasiddhi* occupies an interesting position in the history of Buddhist philosophy, belonging to a time of *Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna* synthesis and containing many ideas which are found in elaborated form in the writings of either the *Madhyamaka* or the *Yogācāra*.[38] For instance it makes great use of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) concept and goes on to create a teaching based on three truths. What is important to us at the moment is Harivarman's doctrine of three kinds of awareness:

(i) Awareness of concepts (*prajñapti*)
(ii) Awareness of phenomena (*dharma*)
(iii) Awareness of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).[39]

The examination of these groups comprises Harivarman's chapter on emptiness. The first awareness, i.e. that of *prajñapti*, however is of most interest, since here we are told that:

> ... concepts are names conventionally attached to associations of phenomena (*dharmas*); the concept of a wagon is thus dependent on the association of wheels, axles and so forth, and the concept of a man is dependent on the association of the Five Groups (*skandhas*). These concepts are unreal, for there are no entities to which they correspond; but they are useful to us in the ordinary course of living.[40]

Harivarman uses the terms conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and ultimate (*paramārtha*) truth and maintains that, while the former is a truth in terms of concepts (*prajñapti*), the latter corresponds to reality as such.[41] He also asserts that *prajñaptis* are devoid of own-characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) and can not therfore be the source of true knowledge. We are left to infer that true knowledge can only come through *paramārthasatya*. The *Satyasiddhi* also contains a long discussion of the possible relations between concepts and real phenomena. Using the example of a pot, Harivarman argues that

36 *ibid.* p. 22
37 cf. Priestley (1970).
38 *T.* 1646 p. 327a 1.8.
39 Priestley *op. cit.* p. 31.
40 *T.* 1646 p. 327a 1.21.
41 *T.* 1646 p. 328c 1.18.

it would be incorrect to hold that there is a total non-existence of such an object. If this were the case, the same may be applied to guilt, merit, bondage, release, etc. In other words a nihilistic attitude would easily spill over into the moral field and render Buddhist soteriology meaningless. Such an argument is analogous to that employed by Nāgārjuna in *MMK*. xv. The imaginary opponents of Harivarman and Nāgārjuna take the view that a consequence of maintaining the emptiness of concept (*prajñapti*), or in Nāgārjuna's case own-being (*svabhāva*), renders that which is denoted non-existent. Both Buddhist authors vigorously reject such a conclusion. For them the correct understanding of the relationship between concepts and real phenomena is the key to the Buddhist path. Both reject nihilism. In the case of Harivarman the rejection of the ultimate value of concepts does not negate the underlying reality. Pots, and so forth, do exist from the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) point of view, and the Buddha chooses to use convention as a vehicle to lead the ignorant towards awakening, even though ultimately (*paramārtha*) language makes no particular contact with reality.

Harivarman seems to have accepted the classical *Abhidharmic* theory that conventional things are in reality associations of primary existents and added the implicit notion that concepts only apply to conventional constructs. In the final analysis these constructs are devoid of reality. Although Harivarman's position is not as explicit as that found in the *Mahāyāna*, there are some grounds for suggesting that his theory, along with that of the *Prajñaptivāda*, represents a halfway house between the truth formulations of the *Sthaviravāda* proper and the *Mahāyāna*.

In conclusion let us survey the doctrines relevant to truth in the texts of the early Buddhist period. In the earliest phase of the canon we find the idea that the Buddha's teaching comprises a coherent whole, and in that sense truth may be claimed to be one. Although it is impossible at this stage to pinpoint a chronology in the development of Buddhist thought, we may note the early existence of an idea concerning two levels of discourse; implicit (*neyārtha*) and explicit (*nītārtha*). The first reflects worldly usage while the second is technical and indicates the user's Buddhist insight and particularly his knowledge of *dharmas*. Some texts, notably the *Milindapañha*, come tantalisingly close to the *Mahāyāna* position and may be interpreted as promoting the view that everything which can be articulated is only conventionally true. From lack of evidence we should not push this too far, but we may note that both the *Prajñaptivādins* and Harivarman seem to be moving towards a resolution of their respective truth and linguistic doctrines in a *Mahāyāna*-like direction. In their case we have some reason to suggest an adherence to the view that what can be articulated is ultimately non-existent, while that which is ultimately the case must be inexpressible.

This is the general position we have arrived at through examination of early sources. In the next chapter we must discover what the authors of *Mahāyānist* works have to say on the subject. We shall then be in the position to judge whether or not there was a continuity of thought on this particular point.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TWO TRUTHS AND THE THREE NATURES

With a foundation in the investigations of the previous chapter we are now in a position to examine any distinctive features of the truth formulations of the *Mahāyāna*. In the process the veracity of the commonly held belief that *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* hold differing doctrines with regard to the truth may be tested.

The theory of two truths is found in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, though explicit statement of it is not common. Murti's statement that:

> The doctrine is already well-developed in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and other *Prajñāpāramitā* texts ...[1]

is therefore something of an exaggeration. It seems that the terms *saṃvṛti-* and *paramārthasatya* are not in fact contrasted in the earliest texts of this corpus.[2] While we have noted in the previous chapter that the two terms were extensively used by some of the schools of the early Buddhism, it is to Nāgārjuna that we turn for the first rigorous treatment of this particular doctrine. However before doing so let us examine the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature a little more fully, particularly since these texts are considered authoritative by both the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogācāra*.

It is certainly the case that the *Prajñāpāramitā* distinguishes between the understanding of the wise, and that of ordinary people:

> Those who course in duality cannot grow in merit. All the foolish common people are supported (*niśrita*) by duality, and their merit cannot grow. But a *bodhisattva* courses in non-duality.[3]

In other words the understanding of non-enlightened persons is infected by false dichotomies which arise from ignorance (*avidyā*). The enlightened person however has developed a non-dual form of knowledge (*advaya-jñāna*) which transcends the distortions imposed on the minds of the common folk. We have met with such an idea before.

Another important notion in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature concerns the relationship between words and the entities that they signify. Now the entities in question are termed *dharmas* and Conze tells us that the ontological status of *dharmas* in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature may be considered in a five fold manner. They are non-existent, they are devoid of a mark (*lakṣaṇa*), they are isolated (*vivikta*), they have never come into

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1 Murti (1960) p. 244.

2 cf. entries: *Saṃvṛtisatya* and *Paramārthasatya* in Conze, E. *Materials for a Dictionary of Prajñāpāramitā* Tokyo (1973).

3 *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* fol. 486 Dutt, N. (ed.) Calcutta Oriental Series, No. 28, London (1934) quoted in Conze (1952) p. 126.

existence, and finally their existence may be understood to be purely nominal.[4] The last member of the list implies that dharmas are merely words, being nothing more than conventional expressions (*vyavahāra*) for the purpose of discourse among the unenlightened. In like manner the Buddha may be said to be "the same as speechless silence".[5] Now this does not seem to mean that the entity "the Buddha" is totally non-existent since this would necessarily entail a nihilistic attitude towards the spiritual life. Rather the word "Buddha" cannot itself properly represent the ineffable nature of that which it signifies. This interpretation is upheld by another quotation:

> ... words are merely artificial constructions, which do not represent things (*dharma*) ... (they are) adventitious designations, which are imagined and unreal.[6]

From the fact that words are said to be adventitious (*āgantuka*) designations one may infer that the relation between a word and the thing it putatively signifies is problematic. Nevertheless it does not follow that one will be justified in negating the existence of the thing denoted. If this is the case then the *Prajñāpāramitā* merely expresses a theory which has already been met with in our earlier investigations concerning the proto-linguistic doctrines outlined in the *Milindapañha*, the more fully worked out accounts of the *Bahuśrutika-Vibhajyavāda* (*Prajñaptivāda*), and in the *Satyasiddhiśāstra* of Harivarman. As we have seen, these doctrines harmonise quite closely with a two-truth system of thought. We may then be justified in saying that the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature contains implicit reference to the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*) truths.

The text of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā sutra*, which was at some stage revised according to the divisions of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* contains a section known as "The chapter preached at the request of Maitreya" (*Byam shus-kyi le'u*). It is found in one Sanskrit and three Tibetan recensions, all of which are in close agreement, although it is totally missing from all the Chinese sources. These facts combined with the apparently distinct nature of the doctrines contained in the chapter have led some scholars to assert that it is a later interpolation. Let us now analyse these claims in some detail.

The chapter starts off by putting forward the view that things (*dharmas*) may be said to possess three aspects.

> Maitreya, that which is imagined form (*parikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ*) should be seen to be without substance (*adravyam*). That which is discerned form (*vikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ*), because of its substantiality (*sadravyatāṃ*), should be viewed as substantial, although it never exists independently (*svatantra*). That which is the essential nature of form (*dharmatā-rūpa*) should be seen to be neither substantial nor

4 *ibid.* p. 122–4.
5 Masuda, J. (ed.) *Saptaśatikā* in *Journal of the Taisho University* 6–7/2 (1930) p. 221.
6 *Śatasāhasrikā* p. 118–119, quoted by Conze. *op. cit.* p. 122.

> non-substantial, being an appearance of ultimate reality (*paramārtha prabhāvitaṃ*).[7]

Each of these aspects is elaborated during the course of the chapter. With regard to the first:

> Maitreya: (If O Bhagavat, all dharmas have no own being), how then should the *Bodhisattva*, who courses in *Prajñāpāramitā* train in all *dharmas*, i.e. from form to the *Buddhadharmas*? Being asked thus, the Bhagavat replied: He should train in the fact that all (things from form to the *Buddhadharmas*) are mere names (*nāmamātra*).[8]

This first part of the teaching seems to be a reiteration of the designation-only (*prajñaptimātra*) which we have already noted plays an important role in some early schools. Tsong-kha-pa confirms this interpretation when commenting on the above quotation, in his *Legs-bshad snying-po*.[9] He understands the quotation to imply that names are something adventitious (*āgantuka*) to the entity they are supposed, by the unenlightened, to signify. In other words, it is not the real existence of form (*rūpa*) that is negated in the *sūtra* but the existence of form (*rūpa*) in so far as it is merely a conventional designation (*nāma-saṃkeṭa-svabhā*). As far as the statement "this is form" is concerned therefore, it is nothing but a nominal designation (*nāmaprajñapti*). This should not lead us to negate the form (*rūpa*) itself which is the basis (*āśraya*) of the designation (*prajñapti*). In its own treatment of this first aspect the *sūtra* tells us:

> From form etc. to *Buddhadharmas* exist by way of worldly social agreements and conventional expression (*vyavahāra*) but not from the ultimate point of view (*paramārthataḥ*)[10]

Translated into modern terminology, the author seems to be getting at the idea that language forms a net which has been cast about reality. This net

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7 *Maitreya Chapter* (*MC*) IV. 43–45
cf. Conze and Iida (1968).
yan maitreya parikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ idaṃ adravyaṃ drastavyaṃ. yad vikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ idaṃ vikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ sadravyatāṃ upādāya sadravyaṃ draṣṭavyam na tu svatantra vṛttitaḥ. yad dharmatā rūpan tan naivādravyaṃ na sadravyaṃ paramārtha prabhāvitaṃ draṣṭavyam

8 *ibid.* I. 1—II.6
atha khalu maitreyo bodhisattvo mahāsattvo bhagavantam etad avocat : yadi bhagavann abhāvasvabhāvāḥ sarvadharmās tadā bhagavan prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caratā bodhisattvena mahāsattvena bodhisattva śikṣāyām śikṣitu kāmena rūpe kathaṃ śikṣitavyam?... buddhadharmeṣu kathaṃ śikṣitavyam?
evam ukte bhagavān... evam aha ... nāmamātrakaṃ rūpam iti śikṣitavyam ... nāmamātram yāvad buddhadharma iti śikṣitavyam

9 cf. Iida (1980) p. 259–269.

10 *MC*. III. 26
loko saṃketa vyavahārato maitreya rūpam asti, na tu paramārthato

possesses a certain coherence and is conducive to social intercourse, but is itself a meta-structure which obscures the concrete beneath it.

Tsong-kha-pa draws parallels between the three aspect doctrine of the *Prajñāpāramita* and a similar notion to be found in the *Saṅdhinirmocana-sūtrā*. In this latter text the aspects are referred to as marks or characteristics (*laksaṇa*) and with regard to the first it says that it is:

> Determination by means of names and conventional terms (*nāma saṃketa-vyavasthāpanam*) of self nature (*svabhāva*) and specifications (*viśeṣa*) in the sign of something conditioned (*saṃskāranimitta*) in speaking of form (*rūpa*) etc.[11]

This is interesting because a virtually parallel passage exists in the *Maitreya chapter*. In this passage the first aspect, imagined form (*parikalpita-rūpa*), is said to be:

> False imagination (*parikalpanā*) with regard to the entity which is the sign of something conditioned (*saṃskāranimittavastu*) as having self-nature (*svabhāva*) of form etc. based on the name (*nāma*), notion (*samjñā*), designation (*prajñapti*), conventional term (*saṃketa*) or expression (*vyavahāra*) i.e. form etc.[12]

Unscrambling this rather complex terminology it appears that both texts accept an entity which underlies designation. This entity or property (*vastu*) is the sign of something conditioned. The problem with signifying such an entity (*vastu*) nominally is clearly stated. By the use of language a self nature (*svabhāva*) or substance is imputed to that entity which it does not in fact possess. False imagination (*parikalpanā*) therefore, the first of the three aspects, results in the false attribution of self nature (*svabhāva*) to conditioned things.

This is made clearer when we look at the second of these aspects. This is termed discerned form (*vikalpita rūpa*) and the *Maitreya chapter* defines it in the following way:

> Discerned form is the stable state (*avasthānatā*) of that entity which is the sign of something conditioned in its true nature (*dharmatā*) and merely discerned (*vikalpamātra*). Having depended on the discernment there is a verbal expression ... 'this is form'.[13]

A distinction is being made between these first two aspects, which in Western terminology parallels the distinction between apperception and perception. On the difference between these two Leibniz tells us:

11 *Saṅdhi.* vii. 25–27

12 *MC.* IV. 39

... yā maitreya tasmin saṃskāranimitte vastuni rūpamiti nāmasaṃjñā saṃketa prajñaptivyavahāran niśritya rūpa svabhāvatayā parikalpanā idaṃ parikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ.

13 *MC.* IV. 40

yā punas tasya saṃskāranimittasya vastuno vikalpamātra dharmatāyāṃ avasthānatā vikalpa pratītya abhilapanatā tatra idaṃ nāmasaṃjñāsaṃketa prajñaptivyavāharo rūpaṃ iti

> The passing state ... is nothing other than what is called perception, which must be carefully distinguished from apperception or consciousness...[14]

Perception is a momentary contact with an external object which in the instant it takes place precisely mirrors that object on the surface of consciousness. Apperception follows on, immediately shaping the mirror image in such a way as to make it cohere with past images. In other words, as soon as the mirror image is received it is modified by the processes of consciousness and ceases to be uniquely individual. As Leibniz says, it becomes confused. If we apply these ideas to an interpretation of the first two aspects then the discerned form (*vikalpita rūpa*) in some senses conforms with the initial perceptual image. It represents a stable state (*avasthānatā*) of the entity which is a sign of something conditioned (*saṃskāranimittavastu*), or rather it is in complete correspondence with the true nature (*dharmatā*) of the entity (*vastu*). This is why it is said at this point to be merely discerned (*vikalpamātra*), since no process has so far taken place to disturb, modify or confuse its stability. The attempt to fit it into a coherent picture which will be amenable to treatment by language however gives rise to the imagined form (*parikalpita rūpa*) or the form which has putative self-nature (*svabhāva*).

The *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* gives the second aspect the title, the dependent characteristic (*paratantralakṣaṇa*), since the first aspect is dependent upon it and it acts as the support for the imagined characteristic (*parikalpita-lakṣaṇāśraya*). For this *sūtra* the dependent (*paratantra*) appears to be the dharmic world itself, although this world is not comprised of individual dharmas possessing self nature (*svabhāva*) as believed by the ignorant, but a plenum of mutually conditioned things in a constant state of flux. This second aspect then has a substantiality (*sadravya*) which the first does not possess, but this substantiality is not to be understood as the sum of a multiplicity of individual self-natures (*svabhāva*). Concluding a discussion on the first two aspects, Tsong-kha-pa says:

> We negate the basis, which is constituted by name which is not postulated as being by means of conventional expression. On the other hand, we do not totally negate, in general, the place [or property (*vastu*)] of the basis which is constituted by name.[15]

Tsong-kha-pa is clearly using the partial (*paryudāsa*) negation which, as we mentioned in chapter two, can be found implicitly in use in *MMK*. In the present case the name itself is totally negated as constituting an entity, while the entity which is signified by the name is affirmed.

Let us move on to the third aspect mentioned in the *Maitreya chapter*

14 *Monadology*. 14
quoted in *Leibniz Philosophical Writings* ed. Parkinson, G.H.R. (ed.) London (1973), p. 180.

15 Quoted in Iida *op. cit.* p. 267.

where it is designated the true nature of form etc. (*dharmatā rūpa*). This true nature of form is said to be equivalent to the true nature of things (*dharmānām dharmatā*) the *dharma* element (*dharmadhātu*), suchness (*tathatā*), the reality limit (*bhūtakoṭi*), eternally and constantly devoid of self-nature (*niḥsvabhāvatā*). It is said to be equivalent to the absence of the first aspect (*parikalpitarūpa*) from the second (*vikalpitarūpa*).[16] The *Saṅdhinirmocana* calls it the accomplished characteristic (*pariniṣpanna-lakṣaṇa*) and corroborates what has been said above. The *pariniṣpanna* is simply stated as the middle aspect (i.e. *paratantra*) eternally devoid of the first aspect (i.e. *parikalpita*) which is itself devoid of self nature (*niḥs-vabhāva*) and consequently without correspondence to anything absolute (*apariniṣpanna*).[17]

To summarise, the three aspect doctrine may be said to concern the nature of things, and their possible understandings by people of differing degrees of spiritual development. The doctrine itself hinges on the second aspect which is referred to variously as the discerned form (*vikalpita rūpa*) or the dependent characteristic (*paratantralakṣaṇa*). Now, both *sūtras* hold this second to be identical with the third, once imagination has been destroyed. Imagination, the result of ignorance (*avidyā*), leads to the construction of an external world constituted by substantial entities. The extirpation of this world-view leads to destruction of the subjectivity and objectivity which are characteristics of the imagined nature (*parikalpita*). Speaking of the purified aspect of the dependent nature (*paratantra*) the *sūtra* informs us that:

> Whatever is discerned form, because of its substantiality, is viewed as substantial, although it never occurs as an independent reality (*svatantravṛttah*).[18]

This means that something must still be present once ignorance has been uprooted and the mental concepts associated with it have been suppressed. However this can no longer be presented as merely external existents. Reality is no longer seen as independent, or other, to self. In this state there is a union of self and other. This is the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpanna*).

In a sense the *vikalpitarūpa/paratantrasvabhāva* may be seen as the basis for the arising of the other two, though ultimately there is no separation

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16 *MC.* IV. 41.
yā utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād va sthitaiveyam dharmānām dharmatā dharmasthititā dharmadhātur yat tena parikalpitarūpeṇa tasya vikalpita rūpasya nityaṃ nityakālaṃ dhruvan dhruvakālaṃ niḥsvabhāvatā dharma nairātmyan ta-thatā bhūtakoṭir idaṃ dharmatā rūpaṃ

17 *Saṅdhi* vi. 6–10.

18 *MC.* IV. 44
yad vikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ idaṃ vikalpitaṃ rūpaṃ sadravyaṃ
upādāya sadravyaṃ draṣṭavyaṃ na tu svatantra vṛttaḥ.

between it and the *parinispanna*; there merely appears to be separation of the pair under the conditions of ignorance. Under such conditions the imagined (*parikalpita*) aspect operates abstractively in that it isolates specific items from the flux of existence, conjuring up discrete existents when there are, in reality, no such things. The *Maitreya chapter* tells us that the third aspect represents the total absence of the first. This corresponds with things seen as they truly are (*yathābhūtam*), free from the superimposition of individual self-natures (*svabhāva*). This vision of things is said to be ultimate (*paramārtha*), devoid of language and consequently inexpressible (*nirabhilapyā*), the true nature of things (*dharmānāmdharmatā*) and suchness (*tathatā*), amongst other synonyms. As we shall see subsequently these are the usual synonyms employed by the *Mahāyāna* when talking about ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*).

Earlier in this chapter we noted a Leibnizian parallel to the first two aspects of the three nature theory. Such a parallel becomes even more prominent in the works of later *Yogācārins*, particularly in the writings of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. In their attempt to work out a thorough going theory of knowledge they hold that perception (*pratyakṣa*) consists of one pure moment of sensation immediately followed by subsequent moments of thought activity in the minds of the unenlightened. While the first moment is uncontaminated and in the enlightened provides true knowledge, further moments will distort the image in a direction determined by the past actions and predilections of the perceiver. This distorted image finally coheres into a speculative theory of reality which, because of its mistaken premises, inevitably leads to suffering when applied to the "real" world. Such a situation is clearly described as *parikalpita svabhāva* in the three-natures theory. For Dignāga the initial moment of perception is pure since mental contamination is not yet at work. This will correspond to the dependent nature (*paratantra*). At this point subjectivity and objectivity have not arisen and knowledge may operate in a manner in which externality has no real sense. Now Dignāga holds out the possibility of all moments being like this. This will be equivalent to the attainment of *nirvāṇa* since all thought construction will have stopped and things will be seen as they are (*yathābhūtam*). Such knowledge, though one must be careful to distinguish it from conventional knowledge dependent on the subject/object dichotomy (*prapañca*), is the accomplished nature (*parinispanna*).

The above interpretation suggests that the three-natures theory may be used to provide a soteriological scheme for the aspiring Buddhist. *Parikalpitasvabhāva* will represent the starting point of the path in ignorance while *paratantra* becomes the bedrock of this samsāric condition but at the same time signifies those moments of pure sensation at the base of everyday experience which may be met with more powerfully in medita-

tion. *Parinispanna* corresponds to the end of the path in which nothing but pure sensation exists and there is no knower and nothing known. This is *nirvāṇa*.

Now the *Maitreya chapter* is not found in all the recensions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* text in question. Since the doctrine of the three aspects it contains corresponds closely to the *trilakṣaṇa* teaching of the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra*, which is understood by Buddhist tradition to be authoritative for the *Yogācāra*, many scholars have considered it to be a later interpolation in a body of text which is at doctrinal variance with it. As Obermiller puts it:

> As this differentiation appears to be identical with the teaching of the three aspects of existence, as we have it in the *Saṃdhinirmocana*, the *Yogācāras* consider the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* to be a text, the main standpoint of which is quite the same as that of the said *Sūtra*, i.e. a *Yogācāra* work.[19]

Bu-ston, in his history of Buddhism, confirms this point of view by maintaining that the chapter containing Maitreya's questions was never retrieved by Nāgārjuna during his visit to the realm of the *Nāgās*, as was all the rest of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. The foremost modern scholar on the subject, E. Conze, goes along with the consensus when he points out that:

> A modern historian, on the other hand, cannot fail to note that this "*Maitreya chapter*" differs radically from the remainder of the *Prajñāpāramitā* in vocabulary, style and doctrinal content.[20]

If we tentatively disregard the testimony of Bu-ston, since the only evidence to support his claim is mythological tradition, both Obermiller and Conze take their stand on the ground that the chapter in question differs doctrinally from the body of the text. This is not a view that has been universally shared by the Buddhist tradition. Tsong-kha-pa, for instance, sees the *Maitreya chapter* as quite compatible with the rest of the text.[21] Now many commentators before Tsong-kha-pa, who wrote from a *Madhyamaka* point of view, held that while the body of the *sūtra* was written as direct meaning (*nītārtha*), the Maitreya chapter has only an indirect meaning (*neyārtha*) and consequently needs further elaboration by a qualified teacher. Tsong-kha-pa disagrees. For him the whole of the text has a direct meaning (*nītārtha*). However he is still at pains to make a distinction between the three aspect theory and the three self-nature (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine of the *Yogācāra*. As we have already seen he will not equate the teachings of the *Maitreya chapter* with the *trilakṣaṇa* theory of

19 Obermiller (1935) p. 97–98.
20 in Conze and Iida *op. cit.* p. 233.
21 Tsong-kha-pa *Legs-bshad snying-po*
Tokyo reprint 150, 203, 4ff

the *Saṅdhinirmocana sūtra*. His position seems to entail a denial of the fact that the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* is *āgama* for the *Yogācāra*, otherwise he would have to accept that the *trilakṣaṇa* and *trisvabhāva* doctrines are essentially the same, and that the *Yogācāra* teachings must be in accord with the three aspects of the *Maitreya chapter*. He fails to do this explicitly and to a certain extent this puts him in an awkward position. This is because he wishes to maintain a distinction between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* teachings. How far is he justified in making such a distinction? Let us turn to an examination of Nāgārjuna's understanding of reality to see whether this will throw light on the matter.

One must first of all see Nāgārjuna's teaching in its correct context. The doctrine of two truths (*satyadvaya*) is first raised in *MMK*. xxiv. The truths are actually brought forward in argument with an opponent who asserts that since Nāgārjuna teaches everything to be empty (*śūnya*), certain consequences of a nihilistic nature follow. These consequences include the rejection of the existence of the Four Noble Truths, the impossibility of true knowledge (*parijñā*), the pointlessness of developing any spiritual discipline (*bhāvana*) and the incoherence of the triple jewel (*triratna*), i.e. the *Buddha*, the *Dharma* and the *Saṅgha*. Nāgārjuna responds by arguing that his opponent has misunderstood his particular doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). As such the charge of nihilism will not hold. Nāgārjuna seems to mean that the opponent has confused emptiness with non-existence, and when Nāgārjuna claims *dharmas* to be empty (*śūnya*) this is not meant to imply that they are devoid of existence. He merely wishes to point out that *dharmas* are empty of something in particular and this something is in fact self-nature (*svabhāva*).

It is to elaborate this argument that Nāgārjuna introduces the two truths.

> The teaching of the *Dharma* by various Buddhas is based on two truths; namely the worldly conventional truth and the ultimate truth.[22]

He goes on to add that this teaching of the Buddha is profound (*gambhīra*) precisely because it makes the distinction between two truths.[23] The reader has the impression that Nāgārjuna considers the Buddha to be the initiator of this specific doctrine. He is not claiming it as his own. Such a view confirms the previous chapter, in which we identified a two fold theory of truth in the writings of the *Sthaviras*.

It is also clear that, for Nāgārjuna, the two truths follow directly upon

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22 *MMK*. xxiv. 8
dve satye samupāśritya buddhānāṃ dharmadeśanā
lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ

23 *MMK*. xxiv. 9.

the establishment of the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) since his first comment to his critics is that:

> ... you do not understand the real purpose of *śūnyatā*, its nature and meaning. Therefore there is only frustration and hindrance (of your understanding).[24]

As a consequence,

> If you perceive the various existences as true beings from the standpoint of self-nature (*svabhāva*), then you will perceive them as non-causal conditions.[25]

Now Nāgārjuna, as evidenced by the *maṅgalaśloka* of *MMK*, holds fast to the central Buddhist doctrine of causality or dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), but his opponent has not grasped this fundamental Buddhist revelation. By taking things to possess self-nature (*svabhāva*) the latter has precluded the possibility of them being causally efficient, As such they cannot contribute to the flux of existence. Nāgārjuna's position therefore is that:

> Any factor of existence (*dharma*) which does not participate in relational origination (*pratītyasamutpanna*) cannot exist. Therefore any factor of experience not in the nature of *śūnya* cannot exist.[26]

Nāgārjuna has effectively turned the opponent's criticism upside down and directed it back at him. The opponent has accused Nāgārjuna of nihilism. In response Nāgārjuna has shown that by maintaining self-nature (*svabhāva*), causal efficiency in both the moral order and in the *dharmic* world is negated. Under such an attack the opponent becomes the nihilist, while Nāgārjuna, in maintaining the existence of things, though empty (*śūnya*) of self-nature (*svabhāva*), can go on to show that his teachings are conducive to the practice of the Buddhist path, the operation of the four Noble Truths, etc.

Nāgārjuna certainly does not feel himself to be a nihilist. In fact *MMK.* xxiv.19 implies the existence of *dharmas* capable of causal relations. It is likely that he would agree with someone who maintains the existence of the world in a general way, though not necessarily in every specific detail. In consequence there is no particular reason why he would disagree with the realistic claim of the *suttas* that:

> ... because of the sensitive surface of the eye as support, and the four originating

24 *MMK.* xxiv. 7
atra brūmaḥ śūnyatāyām na tvaṃ vetsi prayo janaṃ
śūnyatāṃ śūnyatārthaṃ ca tata evaṃ vihanyase.

25 *MMK.* xxiv. 16
svabhāvād yadi bhāvānāṃ sadbhāvam anupaśyasi
ahetupratyayān bhāvāṃs tvam evaṃ sati paśyasi.

26 *MMK.* xxiv. 19
apratītyasamutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate
yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate.

> material elements as the object, there arises eye consciousness. By the meeting of those three arises contact.[27]

although he would object that neither eye, external object or eye consciousness could be possessed of self-nature (*svabhāva*) for such a situation in his view of things would preclude the possibility of contact. Since Nāgārjuna does show some sympathy towards realistic thought, though obviously his particular version of it, how then are the truths to be understood?

In the first place they are not mutually exclusive since the absolute can only be understood with the conventional as its basis.

> Without relying on everyday common practices (i.e. the conventional truth) the absolute truth cannot be expressed. Without the absolute truth, *nirvāṇa* cannot be attained.[28]

Since the two truths appear to have a certain dependence on one another it is unlikely that they were designed to fulfill the function performed by the two categories of a dualistic system such as *Sāṃkhya* or Cartesianism. For instance, *Sāṃkhya* deals with two mutually exclusive realities [primordial matter (*prakṛti*) and souls (*puruṣa*)], not a single reality which can be treated in a twofold manner. The two fundamental principles of *Sāṃkhya* may be termed truths in the ontological sense of the word, i.e. when the word truth is used as a synonym for being. Certainly the Sanskrit term for truth (*satya*) has this connotation since it contains within itself the word for being (*sat*). Under these circumstances, and since *Sāṃkhya* puts forward the notion of two mutually incompatible spheres of being, one may be justified in claiming that it teaches two truths. However, this is not the sense given by Nāgārjuna to his notion of two truths (*satyadvaya*). He is not a dualist and does not recognise two entirely independent ontological realms. Rather, he recognises two epistemic orientations towards one reality. These are the orientation of the ordinary person, and the orientation of the enlightened person. This is made clear by his references to the states of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

> *Saṃsāra* is nothing essentially different from *nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa* is nothing essentially different from *saṃsāra*. The limits of *nirvāṇa* are the limits of *saṃsāra*. Between the two, also, there is not the slightest difference whatsoever.[29]

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27 *M.* ii. 75
Avuso nissayabhāvena cakkhuppasādañca ārammaṇabhāvena catusamuṭṭhānikarūpe ca paṭicca cakkhuviññāṇaṃ nāma uppajjati tiṇṇam saṇgati phasso ti tesam tiṇṇam saṅgatiyā phasso nāma uppajjati.

28 *MMK.* xxiv. 10
vyavahāraṃ anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate
paramārthaṃ anāgamya nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate

29 *MMK.* xxv. 19–20
na saṃsārasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam

Nāgārjuna wishes to establish a link between the two truths on the one hand, and *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* on the other. Now *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are said to be identical since they have the same limit (*koṭi*), which probably means that they refer to the same reality seen in the first case under the condition of ignorance (*avidyā*) and in the second through the eye of wisdom (*prajñā*). It is clear then, that the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) must be closely connected with *samsāra* while the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) corresponds with *nirvāṇa*.

Saṃvṛti is defined in Candrakīrti's commentary on *MMK* in three senses. It is said to be (a) the obscuration of the true nature of things through ignorance, (b) reciprocal dependence and finally (c) social convention involving the world of ordinary language and translation.[30] Sprung[31] argues that *saṃvṛti* involves the belief in a person (i.e. conceptions such as "I" and "mine") and in existence understood in terms of the defilements (*kleśas*). We may add to this by noting that *saṃvṛti* is particularly associated with the kind of defilement (*kleśa*) which leads to the imputation of self-nature (*svabhāva*) to *dharmas*, through the cooperation of language. As a consequence, information obtained through verbal transaction, though having a pragmatic value is, from the ultimate point of view, untrue.

> The Blessed One has said that elements with delusive nature are untrue. All mental conformations (*saṃskāra*) are delusive in nature. Therefore, they are untrue.[32]

When Nāgārjuna talks about elements with a delusive nature, what he means are things which possess self-nature. He is not totally denying the existence of things in the above statement. We have already seen how Buddhists assign a pragmatic truth value to attempts to articulate ultimate reality. The *Parable of the Raft* in *M.* i. 173 shows this clearly in that the Buddhist teaching is said to be promulgated so that it may be used as a vehicle on the path, though from the ultimate point of view it is without meaning and in the end must be abandoned. The articulation of *Dharma*

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na nirvāṇasya saṃsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam
nirvāṇasya ca ya koṭiḥ koṭiḥ saṃsāraṇasya ca
na tayor antaraṃ kiṃcit susūkṣmam api vidyate

30 *Prasannapadā* p. 492 1.10–12, commenting on *MMK.* xxiv. 8
Samantādvaranam saṃvṛtiḥ ajñānaṃ hi samantāt sarva padārtha tattvāvacchādanāt samvṛtir ity ūcyate. parasparasaṃbhavanaṃ vā samṛtir anyonya samāśrayeṇetyarthaḥ. atha vā samvṛtiḥ samaketo lokavyavahāra ityarthaḥ sa cābhidhānābhidheya jñānajñeyādi lakṣaṇaḥ

31 Sprung, M. 'The Mādhyamika Doctrine of Two Realities as Metaphysic' in Sprung, M. (ed.) (1973) p. 41.

32 *MMK.* xiii. 1
tanmṛṣā moṣadharma yadbhagavānityabhāṣata
sarve ca moṣadharmāṇaḥ saṃskārāstena te mṛṣā

then pertains to the path and this is why Nāgārjuna says, at *MMK.* xxiv. 10, that the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) is the basis (*āśraya*) for the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). The articulated *Dharma* may be said to contain within itself the seed of its own transcendence since it hints at the ultimate reality of things which is inexpressible.

None of this is particularly novel. As Ñāṇananda comments, in the context of the Pāli canon,

> However the Buddha, for this part, was content to treat all of them (i.e. teachings) as *sammuti* (=*saṃvṛti*). For him, they were merely worldly conventions in common use, which he made use of without clinging to them". (*D.* i. 202).[33]

Nāgārjuna would interpret such a statement as indicating the fact that the Buddha, while he recognised the substantialising tendency connected with language, was forced to use such language for the purpose of leading the unenlightened towards enlightenment. Actually when one comes to understand that the putative self-natures implicated in the realm of discourse are empty (*śūnya*), then all views concerning the nature of things are uprooted for good. The notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) then, merely indicates the non-existence of self-natures and should not be taken as yet another view concerning the status of the world, etc. This is what Nāgārjuna means when he says:

> Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is proclaimed by the victorious ones as an escape from all view points. It is said (therefore) that those who hold emptiness as a view point are incurable (*asādhya*).[34]

The second or ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) is not a view point since it is not arrived at by the intervention of language. Sprung[35] considers it to be synonymous with many of the terms which are normally employed by the *Mahāyāna* when referring to reality as it really is. The terms in question include *śūnyatā, tattva, dharmatā, nirvāṇa*. One may hint at an understanding of *paramārtha*, though it must be borne in mind that for the *Madhyamaka* it is fundamentally inaccessible through language. Of course we should remember that this notion is not peculiar to the *Madhyamaka*. As we have noted more than once, it is found in the earliest strata of Buddhist thought. Acknowledging these strictures, and using worldly convention, we may intimate, and no more, the structure of the ultimate truth. Any language we use must be predominantly apophatic.

Paramārtha may be said to involve the cessation of concepts such as "I" and "mine":

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33 Bhikkhu Ñāṇananda (1971) p. 40.

34 *MMK.* xiii. 8
śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnāṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ
yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatādṛṣṭis tān asādhyān babhāṣire.

35 Sprung, *op. cit.* p. 43.

> If the individual self (*ātman*) does not exist, how then will there be something which is "my own"? There is lack of possessiveness and no ego (*ahaṃkāra*) on account of the cessation of self and that which is "my own".[36]

Since *saṃvṛti* is tied up with and conditioned by the workings of the unenlightened mind and motivated by ignorance (*avidyā*), *paramārtha* must be a state in which dichotomy (*prapañca*) and thought construction (*vikalpa*) have come to rest. The wandering of the mind (*cittagocara*) ceases and one achieves *nirvāṇa*[37]. One understands the true nature of things (*dharmatā*). This is really so (*tathyam*).[38] It is a state of peace (*śānta*).

> Not conditionally related to anything else, peaceful, not elaborated by dichotomous thought, without thought construction, undifferentiated: such are the (true) characteristics of reality.[39]

It is liberation from the tyranny of the conventional (*saṃvṛti*). *Paramārtha-satya* is incapable of being taught or proved, though it may be hinted at through the spoken word. We meet with statements such as these time and time again in *Mahāyāna sūtras*. For example the *Pitāputrasamāgamasūtra* tells us:

> This much should be understood, the conventional and the absolute ... Among these (two) convention was seen by the *Tathāgata* as worldly usage, while the absolute is inexpressible, unknowable, non-experiential, imperceptible, unrevealed, unmanifest ... not deed, not doer... not gain, not loss, not pleasure, not pain, not fame, not infamy, not form, not without form.[40]

The ultimate truth is free from the duality associated with the conventional and as such is non-dual (*advaya*). It is therefore devoid of *prapañca*.

Now, as we have already said, the ultimate is dependent on the conventional for its expression, but an objection can be raised as to whether there is any way in which the two truths can really "exist". Lindtner has found the seed of such an objection in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.

> A very early piece of evidence to this effect has found its way into the *Mahāvibhāṣā* where objections were raised whether the relative (*saṃvṛti*) exists in a relative

36 *MMK*. xviii. 2
ātmany asati cātmīyaṃ kuta eva bhaviṣyati
nirmamo nirahaṃkāraḥ śamād ātmātmanīnahyoḥ

37 *MMK*. xviii. 7

38 *MMK*. xviii. 8

39 *MMK*. xviii. 9
aparapratyayam śāntaṃ prapañcair aprapañcitaṃ
nirvikalpam anānārtham etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam

40 *Pitāputrasamāgamasūtra* Peking Tibetan Tripiṭaka Vol. 23 p. 215–2
quoted by Wayman (1969) p. 149.
etāvac caiva jñeyaṃ yad uta saṃvṛtiḥ paramārthaś ca... tatra saṃvṛtir lokapracāratas tathāgatena dṛṣṭa yaḥ punaḥ paramārthaḥ so'nabhilāpyaḥ anājñeya aparijñeyaḥ... yāvan na lābho nālābho na sukhaṃ na duḥkham na yaśo nāyaśo na rūpaṃ narūpaṃ ityādi

> sense (*saṃvṛtitaḥ*), or in the absolute sense (*paramārthataḥ*). Whatever the answer, only the absolute (*paramārtha*) exists, and thus the theory of two truths is absurd.[41]

Kumārila (early seventh century) is the most prominent non-Buddhist to criticise the two truth doctrine of Nāgārjuna, actually quoting *MMK.* xxiv. 8 in his commentary on the *Ślokavārttika*.[42] He maintains that it is totally nonsensical to have two separate truths. If *paramārtha* is ultimately true then it follows that *saṃvṛti* is not truth at all. It would be better described as untruth (*mithyā*). Kumārila makes the point that the *Madhyamaka* claim to teach two truths is actually misleading, because what they in fact put forward is one truth (i.e. *paramārtha*) together with one falsehood (i.e. *saṃvṛti*). We must assume that Kumārila's position is a summary of previously held views on this matter.

Amongst the *Mādhyamikas*, it is Bhāvaviveka who first takes up the challenge of these criticisms. Bhāvaviveka probably lived c. 500–570 AD,[43] and consequently occupies a position in the history of *Madhyamaka* thought intermediate between Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti. We could say that, with Bhāvaviveka, we see the beginning of the split between the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* which manifests itself to the fullest estent in the writings of the *Prāsaṅgikas*. Now Bhāvaviveka has been unfairly treated by many scholars of the *Madhyamaka* who have based their understanding of Nāgārjuna's seminal works on the commentaries of Candrakīrti, although this position is now changing. Bhāvaviveka tries to show how Nāgārjuna's statement in *MMK.* xxiv. 8 that the ultimate truth has the conventional truth as its basis (*āśraya*) is true. For him nonsense would be made of the Buddhist *Dharma* if no connection were possible, as opponents of Buddhism, such as Kumārila, claim. Now we have already seen that Nāgārjuna answers exactly the same criticism in his *Vigrahavyāvartanī* when he replies to an opponent's objection that if everything is empty then surely his (i.e. Nāgārjuna's) words are empty and hence his teaching meaningless. Nāgārjuna responds:

> ... if there is the self existence of good *dharmas*, while not being related to something else, there would be no state of a spiritual way of life. There would be neither vice nor virtue, and worldly practical activities would not be possible.[44]

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41 Lindtner (1981) p. 162.

42 Kumārila *Ślokavārttika*, *Nirālambanavāda* Section v 6–10
cf. *Kumarila: Mīmāṃsa-ślokavārttika* Rama Shastri Tailanga Manavalli (ed.) Benares (1898)

43 cf. Kajiyama (1968) p. 200 and Lindtner (1984)

44 *VV.* 54–55
atha na pratītya kiṃ cit svabhāva utpadyate sa kuśalāṇām
dharmāṇām evaṃ syād vāso na brahmacaryasya
nādharmo dharmo vā saṃvyavahārāś ca laukikā na syuḥ
nityāś ca sasvabhāvāḥ syur nityat vād ahetumataḥ

In other words it is precisely because all *dharmas*, and particularly the concepts of Buddhist *Dharma*, are empty of own-being that they are efficient, and since they are efficient they have the capacity to lead towards liberation. This is in complete conformity with *MMK*. xxiv. 8, so it appears that Bhāvaviveka's attempt at exegesis has a basis in the writings of the master. It is surprising therefore that Bhāvaviveka's contemporary, the *Prāsaṅgika* Buddhapālita, and his later follower Candrakīrti, should both choose to disregard the objections of Kumārila, *et al.*, dismissing:

> such controversies as symptomatic of obsession (*grāha*) and themselves retain a non-committed attitude.[45]

towards ontology and epistemology. On this evidence it is not surprising to hear E. Conze say of the school of Bhāvaviveka, the *Madhyamaka-Svātantrika*, that they:

> ... have upheld the well-nigh incredible thesis that in *Madhyamaka* logic valid positive statements can be made.[46]

Again Murti tells us that the *Svātantrikas* are:

> ... against the correct standpoint of the *Madhyamaka*",[47]

although it should be noted that Lindtner[48] regards the term *Svātantrika* to be a misleading attribution with regard to Bhāvaviveka's work. Murti's objection is quite clearly incorrect as we have seen by reference to Nāgārjuna's own works. Conze's statement is more complex, since it is coloured by an implicit assumption that the interpretation of the *Prāsaṅgika*, and particularly of Candrakīrti, is the correct understanding of Nāgārjuna's position. Now the *Prāsaṅgikas* make a distinct and radical separation between the two truths. In their writings they emphasise the fundamental contradiction between the absolute and human understanding and stress the notion, that *paramārtha* completely transcends thought and language. Bhāvaviveka does not disagree here but since, in this form, the doctrine is open to the previously mentioned criticism of Kumārila, he modifies it somewhat.

The most sympathetic work of exegesis on Bhāvaviveka has been carried out relatively recently and mostly by Japanese scholars, although both Lindtner and Eckel have made major contributions to the field of late. One of their number, Kajiyama, observes:

> Although yearning for the absolute truth is naturally accompanied by negation of the relative and conditioned knowledge ... a question should in this context be reflected upon: that is, whether the system of the relative knowledge can be, so

45 Lindtner *op. cit.* p. 163.

46 Conze, E. *Buddhist Thought in India* Ann Arbor (1967) p. 239.

47 Murti, T.R.V. *A Survey of Buddhism* Bangalore (1966) p. 346.

48 Lindtner *ibid.* p. 165.

> far as the phenomenal world is concerned, recognised as valid or not, though it is always delusive from the absolute point of view. This very problem seems to have been a fork which divided ... the *Madhyamaka* itself into the *Prāsaṅgika* and the *Svātantrika*.[49]

Bhāvaviveka takes the view that relative knowledge does have value and is efficient with respect to the Buddhist path. In fact for Bhāvaviveka

> the conventional is the focus for whatever reality there is.[50]

To avoid the radical disjunction between the two truths characteristic of the *Prāsaṅgikas* he makes a distinction between two forms of the conventional (*saṃvṛti*); the real (*tathya*) and the erroneous (*mithyā*). In the *Prajñāpradīpa*,[51] his commentary on *MMK*, he tells us that while water may be said to be real (*tathya*) from the conventional point of view, the water in a mirage is not so and is in fact false (*mithyā*) from the same point of view. He bases his opinion on Nāgārjuna's statement that "everything is so, or not so".[52] By making this point Bhāvaviveka succeeds to a certain extent in deflecting the criticism of Kumārila and others—the Buddhists do accept a conception of falsehood, but in a more particular sense than that used by their opponents. Something is false (*mithyā*) if it does not exist from the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) sense, such as water in a mirage, or the horns of a hare. In the later and more mature *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa* (*MRP*) Bhāvaviveka talks of two differing kinds of *prajñā*. The first corresponds with *samvṛtisatya*, while the second is concerned with *paramārthasatya*. *Samvṛtiprājñā* may be either erroneous (*bhrānta* = *mithyā*), and as such lines up with the various forms of non-Buddhist philosophy, or correct (*tathya*). To complicate matters further *tathyasamvṛtiprajñā* is subdivided, each subdivision corresponding:

> respectively to the three major trends of Buddhist thought: *Śravaka* and *Yogācāra* belong to the level of *neyārtha*, Mādhyamīka to the level of *nītārtha*.[53]

Bhāvaviveka does not stop here. He also allows that ultimate truth (*paramārtha*) may be similarly divided into an ultimate truth which may be inferred (*saparyāyaparamārtha*) and one which is beyond inference (*aparyāyaparamārtha*).

Iida comments:

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49 Kajiyama, Y. 'Bhāvaviveka and the Prāsaṅgika School' *Nava-Nalanda Mahavihara Research Publication* (no date). p. 291.

50 Eckel (1985) p. 42.

51 *Dbu ma' i rtsa ba'i 'grel pa shes rab sgron ma (Prajñāpradīpamūlamadhyamaka vṛtti)* Tohoku 3853
For Tibetan text *cf.* ed. Walleser, M. (ed.) *Prajñāpradīpa* (incomplete) Bibliotheca Indica, New Series, Calcutta (1914).

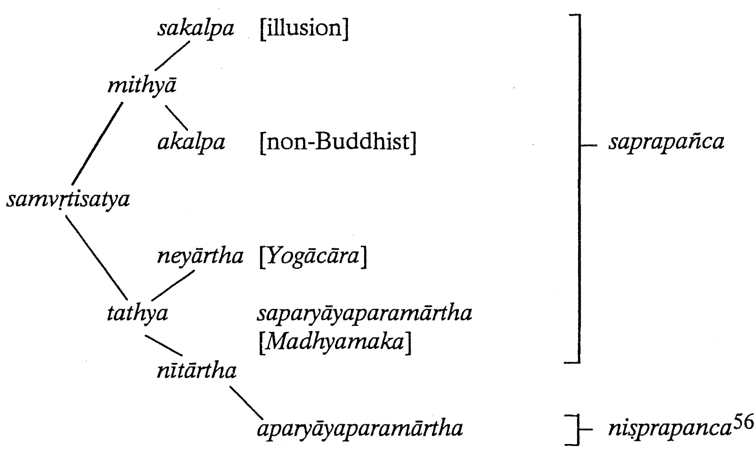
52 *MMK.* xviii. 8a
sarvaṃ tathyaṃ na vā tathyaṃ

53 Lindtner *Bhavya's Critique...* (1986) p. 245.

> Bhāvaviveka grades ultimate reality into two kinds, i.e. supramundane ultimate reality and mundane ultimate reality. The former has no attributes (*nirlakṣaṇa*) and is inexpressible. However the words and deeds of the *ārya* who has some experience of *paramārtha* differ from those of worldlings ... In other words, the words and deeds of the *ārya* based on ultimate reality should be pure and true knowledge of the world (*tathya-saṃvṛtijñāna*).[54]

This does not imply that, for Bhāvaviveka, the expression of truth by an *ārya* is the highest of truths, since he still admits the inexpressible *paramārtha* of the *Prāsaṅgikas*. In his *Madhyamakārthasaṃgraha*[55] he seems to state that the truth formulations of the *Hīnayāna*, and of the heretical systems, both belong to the *saparyāyaparamārtha*, though this is contradicted in his later writings, where only the *nītārthatathyasamvṛti* associated with the *Madhyamaka* is accorded full ultimacy.

The most important aspect of his system from our perspective is the linking of *tathyasaṃvṛti* with *saparyāyaparamārtha*. The following chart shows clearly what Bhāvaviveka intends.



The *tathyasaṃvṛti* provides the connecting link between the two truths. This is the connecting link which the *Prāsaṅgikas* do not possess. It is this lack which leaves them open to the criticism of the likes of Kumārila.

To fully appreciate this particular point we must look at something Bhāvaviveka says in his *Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā*. In this text the real, conventional knowledge, or true knowledge of the world (*tathyasaṃvṛ-*

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54 Iida, S. *An Introduction to Svātantrika-Mādhyamaka* unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Wisconsin (1968) p. 244 n. 16.

55 cf. Katz (1976) p. 257.

56 Based on the diagram of Lindtner *op. cit.* p. 246.

tijñāna) is said to "correspond to the direction of the real object (*bhūtārtha-pravivekānuguṇyatā*)".[57] Similarly in *MRP* we here that:

> [a *Mādhyamika*] maintains the existence of the external realm (*bāhyaviṣya*) [on the level of *samvṛtisatya*]...[58]

though one must of course bear in mind that at the level of *paramārtha* this realm is lacking substantially. This strongly indicates the fact that, for Bhāvaviveka, a realm of some sort does exist, and that it provides the basis for both the enlightened and unenlightened points of views; a position which we have already found in the *Maitreya chapter* of the *Pañcaviṃśatikasāhasrikāprajñāparāmitāsūtra*, and implicitly in the writings of Nāgārjuna. It is Candrakīrti and the other *Prāsaṅgikas* who somehow seem out of step with mainstream *Mahāyāna* thought. Because they maintain a strict adherence to an inexpressible absolute (*paramārtha*), while at the same time rejecting the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) absolutely, the mid-term which links the two together is absent from their system. In consequence they are exposed to criticism. This is a result of their remorseless pushing of the logico-linguistic transcendality of *paramārtha* over *saṃvṛti* to its limit. This in turn results in a seeming rejection of the Buddhist notion of reality (*tattva*), which is the basis of the two point of view. If we cast our minds back to our prior discussion of logic in chapter two we can see why the *Prāsaṅgikas* are forced into total negation (*prasajyapratiṣedha*) while Bhāvaviveka's negations take the partial form (*paryudāsapratiṣedha*).

If we return to Conze's astonishment that Bhāvaviveka was able to make positive statements we can see his partisan view more clearly. Since he follows Candrakīrti in his interpretation of the *Madhyamaka* he will not accept the *saparyāyaparamārtha* of Bhāvaviveka, even though Bhāvaviveka admits that this is only a provisional stage on the way to *aparyāyaparamārtha* which is the final stage of *Madhyamaka* praxis (*bhāvanā*). This attitude incidentally is also at the root of Conze's contention that the *Maitreya chapter* of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is a later interpolation. He follows the interpretations of a 7th century AD writer!

Tsong-kha-pa on the other hand was a *Svātantrika-Madhyamaka*. As such he bases his interpretation of the *Maitreya chapter* on the hermeneutical scheme of Bhāvaviveka. One must bear in mind at this point that the latter author, while accepting that the *Maitreya* chapter concerns the three nature (*svabhāvatraya*) doctrine, regards this section of *P.P* to be not definite in sense (*nītartha*), as maintained by the *Yogācāra*, but merely provisional (*neyārtha*).[59] This need not concern us unduly however, since

57 *MHK.* III. 7c–d quoted in Iida, S. (1973).

58 *MRP.* IV. 6
cf. for Tibetan text Lindtner *Kalyanamitrārāgaṇam* (1986) p. 194.

59 *MRP.* IV. 9
cf. Lindtner *Bhavya's Critique...* (1986) p. 252.

Bhāvaviveka regularly downgrades *Yogācāra āgama* when a response based on reason (*yukti*) eludes him in his various debates. Now, while Bhāvaviveka is in some senses a figure of transition, Tsong-kha-pa certainly holds the *Maitreya chapter* to be of direct meaning.[60] At last then we are able to fully assess the content of the *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction and clearly relate it to the two truth doctrine. Bhāvaviveka provides the key to do so. It is not quite the case, as some scholars have insisted and as we have already noted in the previous chapter, that *nītārtha* and *neyārtha* are respectively synonymous with the *paramārtha* and *saṃvṛti satyas*. The point made by Bhāvaviveka is that it is the ultimate truth which can be inferred (*saparyāyaparamārtha*) which must equate with statements of direct meaning (*nītārtha*) while the truth which is in conformity with real conventional knowledge (*tathyasaṃvṛti*) is of an indirect meaning. Such a distinction allows for both falsehood and non-Buddhist doctrine in the bipartite shape of false conventional knowledge (*mithyāsaṃvṛti*), while still allowing that at the highest level (*aparyāyaparamārtha*) the true nature of things is inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*). The relationship between the *nītārtha/ neyārtha* formulation and the two truth doctrine is therefore more complex than some scholars have believed and this error on their part has led, in some cases, to a presentation of *Mahāyāna* Buddhist doctrine which is open to various objections.

Conze and Iida actually record a conversation with a Tibetan lama, Dezhung Rinpoche, who repeats Bhāvaviveka's interpretation.[61] Briefly, he equates the understanding of ordinary people (*pṛthagjanā*) with conventional truth (*saṃvṛti*) and that of the *āryas* with the ultimate truth (*paramārtha*). However for the *ārya* full understanding or *paramārtha* only comes with Buddhahood. An *ārya* between the first stage (*bhūmi*) of a *Bodhisattva* and *Buddhahood* itself has recourse to a subsidiary level of *paramārtha* (*rnam-graṅs-pa'i don-dam bden pa* i.e. *saparyāyaparamārtha*). Dezhung Rinpoche elaborates on this by saying that the scriptures are understood by people of differing levels of attainment in three separate ways:

(i) By hearing about them (*śrutamayī*) one grasps their general sense
(ii) By thinking about them (*cintāmayī*) one comes to a greater understanding of their significance
(iii) By meditating on them (*bhāvanāmayī*) one has direct experience face to face (*mṅon-sum-gyi-rtogs-par 'gyur*).

This all fits quite clearly with Nāgārjuna's teaching of *MMK*. xxiv. 10 where *paramārtha* is said to have its basis in *saṃvṛti*. Though an enlightened

60 Thurman, R.A.F. (trans.) *Tsong-kha-pa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence* Princeton, Princeton U.P., (1984) p. 355–363.

61 cf. Conze and Iida *op. cit.* p. 231.

person knows that the *summum bonum* of the Buddhist path lies beyond conceptual thought and is "silent", to lead others to enlightenment he promulgates a teaching (*neyārtha*) which when inspected deeply (*nītārtha*) leads to its own abandonment. This is the skillful means (*upāya*) of a Buddha and the ultimate paradox of the Buddhist *Dharma*.

While the *neyārtha/nītārtha* distinction refers to differing levels of attainment with respect to the promulgation (*Dharma*), the two truth distinction refers to differing levels of understanding of reality (*tattva*). *Saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha* both have efficiency through their reference to an ontological basis, i.e. *tattva*. Now, we have seen that Tsong-kha-pa accepts the *Maitreya chapter* as the closest approximation to ultimate truth (*saparyāyaparamārtha* = *nītārtha*) possible through language. He therefore endorses the three aspect doctrine as the correct interpretation of the two truth notion of Nāgārjuna. We have shown independently that this is so. Nevertheless Tsong-kha-pa is unhappy to identify this doctrine with the three nature (*trisvabhāva*) teaching of the *Yogācāra* even though for them, as for Tsong-kha-pa, the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* is *āgama* and seems to deal with just such a doctrine. Funnily enough Conze is less dogmatic on this point, allowing that there may be a close correlation between the three aspects of the *Maitreya chapter* and the *trisvabhāva* of the *Yogācāra*. In his words the chapter in question concerns:

> ... a doctrine of the three *svabhāvas* which may or may not, be identical with the *Yogācārin* division into *parikalpita*, *paratantra* and *parinispanna*.[62]

Now is the time to examine the doctrine of three natures and to determine whether Tsong-kha-pa is right in maintaining a distinction between the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogācāra* on this matter. As we have already noted, the notion of three natures (*trisvabhāva*) finds scriptural authority in the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* and plays a major role in the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. It is however in the writings of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga that we find it treated in a systematic manner.

Before examining the writings of these authors it will be worthwhile to pause to consider the origin of the *Yogācāra*. The tradition retold by the Tibetan doxographer Bu-ston is that Asaṅga, while residing in the *Tuṣita* heaven, had five treatises revealed to him by the Bodhisattva Maitreya, which he promptly wrote down on his return to earth. According to this account Maitreya is the mythological founder of the *Yogācāra*, though to Asaṅga must go the credit for composing the seminal texts. Recently however certain authors, and particularly H. Ui[63] and G. Tucci[64] have

62 *ibid.* p. 233.
63 Ui, H. 'Maitreya as an Historical Personage' *Indian Studies in Honour of Charles Rockwell Lanman* (various authors) Cambridge, Mass (1929).
64 Tucci, G. *On Some Aspects of the Doctrines of Maitreya (nātha) and Asaṅga* Calcutta (1930).

suggested that, rather than being a mythological character, Maitreya was in fact an historical personage and the true founder of the school. Since they bring no true historical evidence to bear in their discussions, reaching conclusions on the grounds that the writings generally ascribed to Asaṅga are heterogeneous, so it is convenient to posit another author besides Asaṅga, the theory of the historicity of Maitreya is not proven. Obermiller[65] on the other hand is of the opinion that Asaṅga is the author of the works ascribed to him, the differences in doctrine presented representing his need to treat different topics for different classes of readership. We have already seen that the same may be true of Nāgārjuna. It is likely then that the real reason for associating these particular works with the name of Maitreya is the heavenly *imprimatur* they would receive from the connection, although it must be borne in mind that we are very far from hearing the last word on this matter.

More importantly for us is another interesting factor. We have seen that the *Maitreya chapter* of the *Prajñāpāramitā* contains one of the earliest explicit formulations of the three aspect doctrine. Now one of the fundamental characteristics of the *Yogācāra* is its own exposition of exactly such a doctrine. Would it not therefore be quite feasible to suggest, assuming this section is earlier than the *Yogācāra*, that the Asaṅga's connection with Maitreya is not with any heavenly *bodhisattva* but rather with the character in the *Prajñāpāramitā*? Is it not possible that the development of this doctrine by the Buddha, based on Maitreya's promptings, led to Maitreya's name being linked with the *trisvabhāva* teaching such that Buddhist tradition considers him the originator of its exposition?

The three nature (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine of the *Yogācāra* concerns the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*), and the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*). For Asaṅga,[66] this doctrine derives its scriptural authority through the *Vaipulyasūtra*, the *Abhidharmasūtra* and the *Ghanavyūha*. It receives more thorough treatment however in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, and the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* of *Asaṅga*, and the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* and the *Triṃśikā* both ascribed to Vasubandhu.

The author of the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* has the following to say with regard to these natures:

> The imagined, the dependent and the accomplished are taught respectively to be objects (*artha*), the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*) and the non-existence of duality (*dvayābhāva*).[67]

65 Obermiller, E. 'The Sublime Science of the Great Vehicle to Salvation' *Acta Orientalia* IX (1933) p. 81–306.

66 Asanga *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* II. 26ff
cf. Lamotte (ed.) (1938) p. 120ff.

67 *Madhyāntavibhaṅga (MV)* 1.5

Sthiramati, commenting on the stanza, says that the imagined (*parikalpita*) nature represents objects (*artha*) in so far as they are constructed through the processes of thought, appearing as self existent entities (*svabhāva*). Once such a process has been accomplished a subject/object dichotomy (*grāhyagrāhaka*) is set up which leads to the belief in self and objects as independent existents. It should be noted here that this position does not in itself mean that Sthiramati and, by implication, Asaṅga are idealists. This interpretation would assume that they wish to go further than the evidence suggests and state that external objects are caused by subjective thought processes. This is not the case. All they are saying is that self and objects, as imagined (*parikalpita*), are in fact devoid of any self existence (*svabhāva*) or substantiality. The third nature, the accomplished (*pariniṣpanna*) is the total non-existence of those factors which lead to the false view of things entailed by the first. *Pariniṣpanna* must, in consequence, be an absence of *parikalpita*, and since the latter establishes the subject/object dichotomy, *pariniṣpanna* is said to be devoid of this duality (*dvayābhāva*).

All this is quite consistent with doctrines we have already noted in connection with the works of Nāgārjuna and earlier writers. For him the unenlightened mind, through thought construction (*vikalpa*), creates false dichotomies (*prapañca*) leading to the belief in a world constructed of building blocks (*dharma*) possessing own-being (*svabhāva*). The enlightened mind however is empty (*śūnya*) of such concepts and the task of someone on the Buddhist path is an attempt to bring about this enlightened state. The conclusion of the path coincides with the awakening of *gnosis* (*prajñā*) which is a non-dual knowledge (*advayajñāna*). We have noted that all previous writers have acknowledged, albeit implicitly, a reality (*tattva*) which gives efficaciousness to these two forms of knowledge. We may now correlate what has so far been discussed before going to look at the second or dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) of the *Yogācāra*. For Nāgārjuna the unenlightened world view coincides with the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) which he equates with *saṃsāra*. This is quite clearly the first or imagined nature (*parikalpita*). Similarly for Nāgārjuna the enlightened world view is the ultimate truth (*paramārtha*), a non-dual *gnosis* which equates perfectly with the third or accomplished nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*). This is *nirvāṇa*. Now, again consistent with Nāgārjuna's position, *nirvāna* and *saṃsāra* are not two separate ontological realms of existence. He says there is no difference between the two, and we have suggested the reason for this is that they both represent epistemic orientations towards one reality (*tattva*).

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kalpitaḥ paratantraśca pariniṣpanna eva ca
arthād abhūtakalpācca dvay ā bhāvācca kathyate.
cf. Bhattacharya, V. and Tucci, G. (eds.) *Madhyāntavibhāgasūtrabhāṣyatīkā of Sthiramati* Part 1, London (1932) p. 19.

This corresponds well with Asaṅga's position. For him the second nature (*paratantra*) is also called the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*). To understand this notion we must quote Asaṅga again.

> The imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*) exists. There is no duality (*dvayaṃ*) in it. There is emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and even in this there is that.[68]

In his commentary on this curious stanza Kochumuttam asserts that it contains four clear statements:

(i) an assertion of the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpo'sti*)
(ii) a negation of duality (*dvayam tatra na vidyate*)
(iii) an assertion of emptiness (*śūnyatā vidyate tu atra*)
(iv) an assertion of the co-existence of the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*) and emptiness (*sūnyatā*) (*tasyam api sa vidyate*).[69]

This is a clear indication that, for Asaṅga at least, the dependent nature (*paratantra*) does exist (*asti*) though it seems that its existence precludes an implication of duality (*dvayaṃ*) and hence, of discrete entities. It is in fact empty (*śūnya*) of all dichotomies. This is the true sense of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the *Yogācāra* system.

Here then *abhūtaparikalpa* (=*paratantra*) is pivotal. It is the uncontaminated state of things and as such is identical with the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpanna*). In this ultimate condition all forms of dualistic thought are uprooted and one sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*). When thought construction appears there is the imagined nature (*parikalpita*). This regards reality as external to self and composed of substantial entities (*dharmasvabhāva*). Actually, however, things are empty (*śūnya*) of any imputed own-being (*svabhāva*). All of this is quite consistent with our interpretation of Nāgārjuna.

The doctrine, essentially unchanged, is reiterated in the works of Vasubandhu. In the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* we are told:

> That which is known as the dependent (*paratantra*) depends on causal conditions. The form in which it appears is the imagined (*kalpitaḥ*) for it is merely an imagination. The perpetual absence of the form in which it (i.e. *paratantra*) appears is to be understood as the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpanna*) for it is never otherwise.[70]

Similarly in the *Triṃśikā* Vasubandhu says:

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68 *MV*.1.2
Abhūtaparikalpo 'sti dvayam tatra na vidyate
śūnyatā vidyate tu atra tasyām api sa vidyate

69 Kochumuttam (1978) p. 37.

70 *Trisvabhāvanirdésa (TSN)* v 2–3
yat khyāti paratantro 'sau yathā khyāti sa kalpitaḥ
pratyaya adhīna vṛttitvāt kalpanāmātra bhāvataḥ
tasya khyatūr yathā ākhyānam yā sadā avidyāmanatā
jñeyaḥ sa pariniṣpanna svabhāvo 'nanyathātvataḥ
Mukhopadhyaya, S. (ed.) *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa of Vasubandhu* Calcutta (1939) p. 1.

> The accomplished (*parinispanna*) is the latter's (i.e. *paratantra*) perpetual devoidness of the former (i.e. *parikalpita*).[71]

In an interesting article on the *paratantrasvabhāva*, N. Aramaki[72] has found a number of meanings of this concept as presented by Asaṅga in his *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*. Among such meanings the most important from our point of view is that it is (i) the base for the appearance of all entities (*sarvadharmapratibhāṣāśraya*), (ii) dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and (iii) pertaining to suffering and pertaining to cleansing (*samklésāṃśiko vyavadānāṃśikaś ca*).[73]

I intend to postpone an examination of position (ii), i.e. the identity of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *paratantra*, until the next chapter which will deal with the concept of dependent origination in some detail. Nevertheless let us clarify positions (i) and (iii). We see that *paratantra* is referred to as both a base (*āśraya*) for the appearance of things, and that state which gives coherence to the twin notions of bondage and release. In fact positions (i) and (iii) are mutually interconnected and may be explained with reference to what has already been said about the three natures.

Paratantra may, in a sense, be considered under two aspects. In its first it is contaminated by imagination with the result that a world of appearance (*pratibhāṣa*) is constructed. Appearances are imputed to possess own-being or substantiality while from the ultimate point of view they do not exist in this way. We have seen that appearance cannot come into being without some more indeterminate form of existence as its foundation. This is why *paratantra* in its imagined aspect is called the base (*āśraya*) for the appearance of all entities. Since one is trapped by imagination into a false view of things leading to suffering, *paratantra* is said to pertain to suffering. Looked at in its second aspect, in which it is uncontaminated by the above processes, *paratantra* is identical to the accomplished nature (*parinispannasvabhāva*). This is said to be the aspect pertaining to cleansing.

Asaṅga puts these notions in the following manner:

> The dependent (*paratantra*) is on occasion the dependent, on occasion the same is the imagined; and on occasion the same as the accomplished.[74]

and

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71 *Triṃś*. 21b
niṣpannaś tasya pūrveṇa sadā rahitatā tu yā
cf. L. de la Vallée Poussin (trans), *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* Paris (1928) p. 527.

72 Aramaki, N. (1967).

73 *ibid.* p. 954.

74 *Mahāyānasaṃgraha (MS)* II.17
gźan gyi bdaṅ gi ṅo bo ñid ni rnam graṅs kyis na gźan gyi dbaṅ no
rnam graṅs kyis na de ñid kun brtags paḥo
rnams graṅs kyis nà de ñid yoṅs su grub paḥo

> *Saṃsāra* is referred to the dependent nature in its aspect of defilement. *Nirvāṇa* referred to the same in its aspect of purity.[75]

Expanding a little we may say that *paratantra* is the basis for the arising of all the pairs of concepts which define the distinction between enlightenment and unenlightenment, be they *nirvāṇa/saṃsāra*, purity/defilement, *paramārtha/saṃvṛti*, bliss/suffering, self/non-self etc.[76] As Sthiramati has pointed out, it is impossible to accept something as relative or absolute without recourse to an underlying substance.[77] The only stipulation we need to make is that this basis (*āśraya*) must not be assumed to have equality of relationship with both elements of the pair. Taking *nirvāṇa/saṃsāra* as an example it is clear that *saṃsāra* represents a falling away from the base; a failure to understand it as it is. *Nirvāṇa* on the other hand is complete identification with the base for objectivity and subjectivity do not exist at this point. The first aspect then reflects disunity in a way that the second does not.

A late text in the *Yogācāra* corpus, Kambala's *Ālokamālā*, dating from the early sixth century AD, refers frequently to the three nature doctrine. Thus:

> Homage to the Buddha (*munīndra*) who has declared that [the entire universe] is only mind [consisting] in the development of the three natures in order to abandon the three kinds of ignorance.[78]

The commentary tells us that the three kinds of ignorance are ignorance of the imagined (*parikalpita*), dependent (*paratantra*) and accomplished (*pariniṣpanna*) natures and we are clearly led to believe that the *svabhāvatraya* doctrine is a kind of philosophical and practical propaedeutic, for ultimately all *svabhāvas* are empty, as we are so regularly told by the *Laṅkāratārasūtra*, e.g.

> There is no self-nature, no thought construction, no reality, no Ālaya; these indeed are so many discrimations cherished by the ignorant who like a corpse are bad logicians.[79]

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75 *MS*. IX. i
de la ḥkhor ba ni gźan gyi dbaṅ gi ṅo bo ñid de kun nas ñon moṅs paḥi char gtogs paḥo
mya ṅan las ḥdas pa ni de ñid rnam par byaṅ baḥi char gtogs paḥo
gnas ni de ñid gñi gaḥi char gtogs pa ste
gźan gyi dbaṅ gi ṅo bo ñid do

76 *MS*. II. 30.

77 *Triṃś. bhāṣya* Lévi (ed.) p. 16.
ataś cāyam upagamo na yuktikṣamo vijñānaṃ api vijñeyavat saṃvṛtita eva, na paramārthata iti, saṃvṛtito'py abhāvaprasaṅgān na hi saṃvṛtir nirupādānā yujyate

78 Lindtner (1985) p. 121
ĀM. 1
ajñānatrayāśāya svabhāvatrayabhāvanā
namas tasmai munindrāya yenoktā cittamātratā

Kambala, despite the impression sometimes given by Lindtner, does not wish to establish the sole existence of mind, but sees that the unfolding of the three natures in praxis leads to the realisation of *vijñaptimātra*. This is none other than the realisation of emptiness.

> It is the limit of the real, it is thusness, it is emptiness, if is sameness, it is liberation, it is the state of representation only.[80]

Vijñaptimātrātā then is the complete elimination of discursive and dichotomous thought and is equivalent to the attainment of the accomplished nature:

> But here [i.e. *parinispannasvabhāva*] there is nothing outside or inside, because both are mutually established. It is not between. But is is certainly not totally non-existent, for it is established as mere mind.[81]

On the surface this could be interpreted as a statement supporting the sole existence of mind, but of course there is no duality of subject and object present. This being so it makes little sense to talk in terms of realism or idealism at this point. Externality and internality lose their meaning here. Kambala adequately deals with this non-dual *gnosis* when he says:

> A Buddha does not understand [things] thus [by way of subject-object] as other people do, for he is in fact the only one who knows this state of dependence of this [consciousness] as such.[82]

To characterise this position as idealism completely misses the point. What we are talking of here is a state in which subject and object are fully realised to be devoid of self nature (*svabhāva*). They are truly in a state of mutual dependence. One can only agree with Hall when he says:

> Mistaking taxonomy for understanding is a fault not limited to modern writers on

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79 *Lanka*. III. 48
na svabhāvo na vijñaptir na vastu na ca ālaya
balairvikalpatā hyete śavabhūtaih kuṭārkikaiḥ
cf. also *Lanka*. II. 198 (surely Lindtner is wrong about *Lanka* II. 193 cf. *ibid.* p. 121)

80 Lindtner *op. cit.* p. 125
ĀM. 11
bhutakoṭiś ca sā saiva tathatā saiva śūnyatā
samatā saiva muktiḥ saiva vijñaptimātratā
A similar list of synonyms is found at *MV*. 1.14; *Lanka*. 10.174, *MS*. 2.26 and *Sandhi*. 28 (cf. *Trimś*. 25).

81 Lindtner, *ibid.* p. 129
ĀM. 27
nātra kiṃ cid bahir nāntar itaretarasiddhituḥ
nāntarāle na nāsty eva cittamātravyavastiteḥ

82 Lindtner *ibid.* p. 139
ĀM. 54
buddho hi na tathā vetthi yathāyam itaro janaḥ
pratītyatāṃ tu tasyaiva tāṃ jānāti sa evahi

> Buddhism. A simlar excessive concern for and trust in doctrinal labels can be seen in ancient Indian philosophers and Tibetan scholastics, and even in the *Abhidharma* itself. Instead of seeking the correct label for Vasubandhu's [and by implication Kambala's] philosophy, we would do better to try to understand it in its own terms. The identification of one school with another (such as that of *Vijñānavāda* with some Western form of idealism) is not only likely to be misleading; it is all too often the point at which the argument stops.[83]

Before concluding this chapter it will be valuable to examine Bhāvaviveka's view of the three nature (*svabhāvatraya*) doctrine, since, in his early works in particular, its examination provides the focus for his attack on the *Yogācāra*. In the *Prajñāpradīpa* there is a criticism of the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) which takes the form:

> Imagined nature consists of mental and spoken utterances... and to claim that this [imagined nature] does not exist is a denial (*apavāda*) of mental and spoken utterances.[84]

Apart from being remarkably similar to the opponent's objection to Nāgārjuna at the beginning of *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, and as such liable to the same defense,[85] a *Yogācārin*, such as Vasabandhu, would agree with Bhāvaviveka that conventionally words and utterances do exist. Their non-existence may only be asserted from the ultimate point of view. Again, when discussing the accomplished nature, the *Prajñāpradīpa* takes issue with the idea that *pariniṣpannasvabhāva* can be grasped. Thus

> All dharmas are utterly unestablished. Thus, while the referent (*gocara*) of omniscience (*sarvākarajñāna*) is called Reality (*tattva*), it is by understanding that the *dharma* element is the non-arising of the object (*jñeya*), reality (*tattva*), the referent (*gocāra*) and the subject (*jñāna*) that one becomes a Buddha.[86]

We have already noted[87] the real lack of conflict between Bhāvaviveka and the *Yogācāra* on this point. Actually both admit the non-referential nature of non-discursive knowledge (*nirvikalpajñāna*). The real crux of Bhāvaviveka's objections has recently been elegantly highlighted by Eckel.[88] For him all *Mahāyānist* philosophy operates within the territory between denial (*apavāda*) and reification (*samāropa*).[89] This is what makes it the middle way. As such both Bhāvaviveka and the *Yogācāra* authors make a point of avoiding these extremes, but

> What one school considers a *denial* is precisely what the other thinks is necessary

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83 Hall (1986) p. 18–19.
84 Eckel (1985) p. 50; cf. Lindtner *Bhavya's Controversy...* (1984) p. 80 paras. 3 and 4.
85 cf. n. 44 *supra*.
86 Eckel *op. cit.* p. 73; cf. Lindtner *op. cit.* p.95 l. 8–12[15]
87 cf. ch.4 *supra*
88 *op. cit.*
89 *ibid.* p. 31

> to avoid *reification* and *vice versa*. Yet both schools agree that a valid ontology is worked out only in the middle ground between the two extremes.[90]

As Eckel makes clear, there is an inherent polarity between denial and reification at the root of *Mahāyana* thinking. Thus at *MMK.* xxiv. 18 we hear that the middle path (*madhyama pratipad*) is both emptiness and *pratītyasamutpāda*. Eckel takes the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* (*MV*) 1.2[91] to be a sort of *Yogācāra* commentary on this, such that:

> The understanding of Emptiness involves the awareness of both an absence [i.e. lack of duality] and a presence (*sat*) [i.e. existence of *abhūtaparikalpa*].[92]

There is then, an excellent overlap between *MV.* 1.2 and the *svabhāvatraya* doctrine. This is illustrated below.

MV. 1.2	*Three Natures*
Duality	Imagined
Imagination	Dependent
Emptiness	Absolute[93]

Bhāvaviveka's problem then is primarily hermeneutical. He fails to recognise the complexity of the *Yogācāra* system.

> In its own terms, the (*Yogācāra*) system gives a constant answer... to the problems of freedom to and freedom from. But when Bhāvaviveka takes the *Yogācāra* concepts and projects them onto a *Madhyamaka* system with *Madhyamaka* presuppositions they give rise to certain obvious anomalies.[94]

Bhāvaviveka's objections are fine within a narrowly circumscribed framework but fail to take into account the essential overlap between the two systems. As Eckel concludes:

> Bhāvaviveka's argument exhibits a fine symetry. He objects to the *Yogācāra* devaluation of imagined reality on the grounds that it involves a denial (*apavāda*) of things whose reality should be admitted. On the other hand, he objects to the attribution of reality to the Absolute on the grounds that it involves a false reification.[95]

Both systems identify alternate extremes but are agreed on the identity of the middle ground.

Hall clearly has similar considerations in mind when he cautions us against the misleading designation of Vasubandhu's thought as "absolute idealism". He sees "Vasubandhu's argument... as one more attempt to find

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90 *ibid.*
91 cf. n. 61 *supra*
92 Eckel *op. cit.* p.35
93 taken from *ibid.* p.38
94 *ibid.* p. 39
95 *ibid.* p. 41.

the Buddhist middle way between positive and negative extremes".[96] and goes on to note that:

> The argument over whether *Vijñānavāda* is idealistic or realistic bears a marked resemblance to the controversy as to whether *Madhyamaka* is nihilism or transcendental absolutism.[97]

While we must be continually aware of any uncritical assimilation of *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* we may bring this chapter to an end by noting a surprising similarity of outlook shared by their representatives. In the past it was generally concluded that the two systems are not in harmony, particularly over their respective three-nature and two-truth formulations. One hopes that the above examination has demonstrated that this is not actually the case. In Nāgārjuna's system we have shown that the two truths implicitly suggest the existence of an ontologically indeterminate existence realm. In consequence Nāgārjuna is saved from a charge of nihilism. Bhāvaviveka, not surprisingly, lines up with his master on this. The mechanics of the *Yogācāra* three-nature doctrine precisely mirrors this, the only difference being that the mid-term (if we may refer to it so) is explicitly included. This makes no difference on close examination, though it has the tendency to open the *Yogācāra* to the unjustifiable charge of holding to a positive depiction of reality.

96 Hall *op. cit.* p. 17
97 *ibid.* p. 18.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NATURE OF REALITY

We have reiterated many times the fact that Buddhism steers a middle course between the extremes of nihilism (*ucchedavāda*) and eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*), since the adoption of either of these two is thought to lead to a rejection of the efficaciousness of the Buddhist path (*mārga*). As Buddhists have consistently maintained this position it is hardly surprising that with regard to the theory of causation, a similar rejection of the extreme positions of indeterminism (*yadṛcchāvāda*) and strict determinism (*niyativāda*) should be upheld. In the *Nikāyas* these doctrines are associated with Makkhali Gosāla and Pūraṇa Kassapa. The former maintains that neither the unenlightened nor the enlightened state has any cause (*hetu*), while the latter holds to the belief that the "... past, present and future is unalterable and fixed".[1] Since both of these contemporaries of the Buddha deny any positive basis on which a person can exert themselves to gain enlightenment, their teachings are referred to as "teachings without a basis" (*ahetuvāda*) in the *Nikāyas*. This is because, while the Indeterminists hold that things may arise without cause or reason (*adhiccasamupanna*), or in other words are entirely random, the Strict Determinists felt that all the factors in the causal process were completely set since the beginning of time. Both doctrines make nonsense of the desire to obtain enlightenment through gradual stages, and of the Buddha's claim to have accomplished such a state in just such a manner. The Buddhist must hold to a doctrine of causality which allows the possibility of the enlightened and unenlightened states and of necessity he must be more flexible than his two opponents' positions allow.

The Buddhist doctrine of arising in dependence or dependent origination (Pali = *paṭiccasamuppāda*; Sanskrit = *pratītyasamutpāda*) possesses the above mentioned adaptability since, as we shall see, it provides both a picture of the world based on causally conditioned entities and allows for the successful operation of the Buddhist path. The first point which we must clarify however, is the status of dependent origination. Since it helps to explain the understanding of the deluded and the wise, is it purely subjective? Jayatilleke[2] certainly does not think that it is, holding that Buddhist scripture itself assigns an objective status to causality. The *sūtra* itself says:

> Causation (*paṭiccasamuppādo*) is said [to have the characteristics of] objectivity (*tathatā*), necessity, invariability and conditionality.[3]

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1 Jayatilleke (1963) p. 143. The story of the teachings of Pūraṇa Kassapa is found in *D*. i. 53. *Makkhali Gosāla* crops up at *M*. ii. 408.

2 *ibid.* p. 447.

It is interesting to note in passing that Jayatilleke gives "objectivity" as his translation for the term *tathatā*, a term to which we will refer again in due course. We shall be in a better position to judge whether or not this is a justifiable translation shortly, but at least it is clear from this scriptural excerpt that, even in the *Nikāyas*, *tathatā* acts as a synonym for causation or, as we shall normally translate the term, "dependent origination" (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).

Other sections of the *Nikāyas* confirm that dependent origination is not an entirely subjective phenomenon, since it is said to exist independently of its cognition.

> What is dependent origination? On account of birth arises decay and death. Whether *Tathāgatas* arise or not, this element (*dhātu*) exists as the fixed nature of things (*dhammaṭṭhitatā*), the normal order of things (*dhammaniyāmatā*) or conditionality (*idappaccayatā*). This the *Tathāgata* discovers and comprehends and having comprehended and discovered it, he points it out, teaches it, lays it down, establishes, reveals, analyses, clarifies it and says "look"![4]

Even if Buddhas do not exist and dependent origination is not discovered, this process remains the key principle which keeps the world in being. This fact suggests that early Buddhism did not work with a subjectively idealistic world picture since the process appears to remain in force whether it is cognised or not.

At this point in our examination of the concept there is little evidence that the causal process referred to is subjective—this supports Jayatilleke. It seems more likely that *paṭiccasamuppāda* has some connection with the ontological existence realm we have mentioned previously. It is noteworthy that the central Buddhist notions of *tathatā* and *dhātu* are intimately connected with it. In regard to this second point, we shall probably be justified in regarding the concept of dependent origination as of central Buddhist concern. This is confirmed by the evidence. One of the most famous stanzas in the *Nikāyas* equates the central content of the Buddhist teaching (*dharma*) with the realisation of the fact of dependent origination.

> He who sees dependent origination sees the Buddhist teaching. He who sees the Buddhist teaching sees [the nature of] dependent origination.[5]

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3 *S*. ii. 26
tathatā avitathatā anaññathatā idappaccayatā ayaṃ vuccati... paṭiccasamuppādo

4 *S*. ii. 25
katamo ca... paṭiccasamuppādo. jatipaccayā... jarāmaraṇam uppādā vā tathāgatāṇam anuppādā vā tathāgatānam ṭhitā va sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā idappaccayatā. taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti abhisambujjhitvā abhisametvā acikkhati deseti paññapeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānīkaroti passathāti cāha

5 *M*. i. 191
yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati
yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati

The nature of existence, understood as dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) is then the central discovery of the Buddha which, along with the Four Noble Truths, marks him out as an enlightened being. The explication of this discovery provides the substance of the Buddhist teaching. Jayatilleke confirms this impression through his assertion that some of the earliest parts of the Buddhist canon stress the centrality of the causal process. It appears that these particular sections remain remarkably unchanged when translated into the *Mahāyāna* context.[6] For instance an early verse of the *Vinaya* which tells us that:

> The great recluse (*mahāsamaṇo*) says that the *Tathāgata* has spoken of the cause of things, which arise from causes and also of their cessation.[7]

is found in virtually identical form in both the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* and the *Āryaśālistambasūtra*.[8]

While there is little doubt that the concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* may be regarded as central to the Buddha's teaching, it may also be safely said that the doctrine underwent considerable development in the course of time. In the earliest strata of the literature the concept is already prominent. The *Sutta Nipāta* for instance praises "the one who sees *paṭiccasamuppāda*",[9] but in this particular text no mention is found of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula which contains twelve members (*dvādaśāṅga*) so familiar in later writings. Even in a text as early as the *Sutta Nipāta* however, an incipient form of this twelve membered doctrine can be discerned. Nakamura seems to be the scholar who has done the most to highlight this particular issue. As he points out:

> There [i.e. the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Suttanipāta*] the theory is not set forth in a systematised way, each link (or item) in the same pattern, as in the case of the Twelve Link Dependent Origination, but rather in a crude, disorderly form which betrays its primitive character.[10]

Of particular interest to us is the way this incipient formula begins. Before the various linkages are enumerated, the first of the classical linkages, ignorance (*avijjā*), is announced in the following way.

> The world (*loka*) is shrouded by ignorance (*avijjā*). On account of avarice (*veviccha*) and sloth (*pamadā*) it does not shine.[11]

6 *op. cit.* p. 454

7 *Vin.* i. 41
ye dhammā hetuppabhavā tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato
āha tesañ ca yo nirodho evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo 'ti

8 *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* Nanjio (ed.) p. 444
Āryaśālistambasūtra Sastri (ed.) p. 26
ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgato'hyavadat
teṣāñ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ

9 *Sn.* 1033

10 Nakamura (1980) p. 167.

If we read this metaphor carefully it seems that the incipient *paṭicca-samuppāda* formula starts from an acknowledgement of the existence of the world (*loka*). However once ignorance (*avijjā*) is aroused the other links follow on inexorably producing a vision of things which is not entirely in accord with the way things really are. The implication is that when ignorance is eradicated the world will appear in its pristine glory; it will "shine". In one way we must disagree with Nakamura's interpretation of this verse however. He holds that, "the term world (*loka*) means 'human beings' collectively".[12] This seems problematic, for such an interpretation of the verse would lead to the charge of subjective idealism against its author. If the term *loka* does refer solely to a subjectively human world, and even if it was capable of being cleansed of ignorance (*avijjā*) and its concomitants, the result would still be entirely subjective. But as we have noted, the dependent origination doctrine may not readily be interpreted subjectively since it exists whether it is discovered by a *Tathāgata* or not. Given this, it would seem that in the present context, the term *loka* is not tied to a purely human realm. This interpretation would appear more feasible in the light of the fact that the term crops up in a context in which subtle doctrinal points are unlikely to be dominant for the *Sutta Nipāta* is one of the most ancient Buddhist texts. In view of this, Nakamura's translation of *loka* appears unduly technical.

In an attempt to more clearly understand the Buddhist theory of causality, we must turn to an examination of the fully developed twelve linked version found in the *Nikāyas*, bearing in mind that while this represents the classical form of the doctrine, there are other formulae, buried in intermediate strata of the canon, in which the total number of links does not add up to twelve. The twelve links or factors are laid down in the following section of the *Majjhima Nikāya*:

> When this is that is; through the arising of this that arises, namely [1–2] Conditioned by ignorance (*avidyā*) are karmic formations (*saṃskāra*); [3] conditioned by karmic formations is consciousness (*vijñāna*); [4] conditioned by consciousness is name and form (*nāmarūpa*); [5] conditioned by name and form are the six [internal] bases of consciousness (*ṣaḍāyatana*), the [five physical organs and the mental organ]; [6] conditioned by the six bases is contact (*sparśa*); [7] conditioned by contact is feeling (*vedanā*); [8] conditioned by feeling is thirst (*tṛṣṇā*) or desire; [9] conditioned by thirst is grasping (*upādāna*), [10] conditioned by grasping is existence (*bhava*); [11] conditioned by existence is birth (*jāti*); [12] conditioned by birth is old-age and death (*jarāmarana*) and also sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief

11 *Sn.* 1048
saṃkhāyà lokasmiṃ parovarāni puṇṇakā ti bhagavā
yass' iñjitaṃ n'atthi kuhiñci loke
santo vidhūmo anigho nirāso
atāri so jātijaran ti brūmī ti

12 *op. cit.* p. 165.

and despair. Such is the origin (*samudaya*) of the whole mass of suffering (*duḥkhaskandha*).[13]

The whole process from ignorance through to old-age and death is, according to this version, an explanation of the second of the four Noble Truths, since all twelve links are said to bring about the arising (*samudaya*) of suffering (*duḥkha*). Now, as an immediate correlate to this formulation the Buddha goes on to enumerate the twelve links in a reverse order, the meaning of which is obviously equivalent to the third of the Noble Truths; the truth of the cessation of suffering (*duḥkhanirodha*).

> [11/12] Being born, ceasing, becoming old and dying cease ... [1/2] Being ignorant ceasing, *karmic* formations cease. When this is not, that is not; This ceasing that ceases ... From the ceasing of ignorance, *karmic* formations cease [1/2] ... from the ceasing of being born, old age and death cease [11/12] and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair do not arise ... Such is the ceasing of this whole mass of suffering.[14]

It appears then that the twelve linked dependent origination formula (*dvādaśāṅgikapratītyasamutpāda*) has two sequences. The first moves off from ignorance (*avidyā*) which conditions the next member, and so on resulting in old-age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*). In this way the origin of the world of suffering is explained. This is compatible with the second Noble Truth. The reversal sequence shows the means by which suffering can be eradicated. By the cessation of ignorance (*avidyā*) the other eleven factors are rendered incapable of arising. This is basically compatible with the third of the Noble Truths. In fact there are sections of the *Nikāyas* in which the Buddha states that the doctrines of suffering (*duḥkha*) and its cessation (*nirodha*) are the heart of the teaching.

> Formerly, and now also, *bhikkhus*, it is just suffering and the cessation of suffering that I proclaim.[15]

This seems to be reiterated in the Buddha's instructions to Udāyin where

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13 *M.* i. 261ff (*Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta* No. 38)
imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti; imass'uppādā idaṃ uppajjati
... avijjā paccayā saṇkhārā ... jāti paccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ
sokoparidevadukkhadomanass'upāyāsā sambhavanti
... evam etassa kevalassa dukkha kkhandhassa samudayo hoti

14 *ibid.*
jāti nirodhā jarāmaraṇa nirodho ... avijjā nirodhā saṅkhāra nirodho
... imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti; Imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati...
avijjā nirodhā saṅkhāra nirodhob ... jāti nirodhā
jarāmaraṇam sokaparidevadukkhadomanass' upāyāsa nirujjhanti
... evam etassa kevalassa dukkha kkhandhassa nirodho hoti

15 *M.* i. 140
pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave etarahi ca dukkhañ c'eva
paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ

an implicit linkage is made between the two sequences of the *pratītya-amutpāda* formula (i.e. forward and reverse), and the Buddhist *Dharma*.

> Wherefore, Udāyin, let be the past, let be the future. I will teach you *Dharma*. When this is, that is; this arising, that arises. When this is not, that is not; this ceasing, that ceases.[16]

Now on the connection between the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination, Lamotte has written an illuminating article.[17] He notes the connection between the forward and reversal sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda* and the second and third truths respectively. On the four truths he comments:

> ... in dealing with the four *Āryasatyas*, the *Aṅguttara* (I. pp. 176–177) reproduces, for the first and fourth, the wording of the Sermon at *Vārāṇasī*, but defines the second by stating the *pratītyasamutpāda* in direct order, and the third by the *pratītyasamutpāda* in inverse order. Under such conditions it is difficult to see how one could acquire knowledge of the four Noble Truths without discovering through so doing the law of Conditioned Co-production and vice-versa.[18]

Since the texts make a strong connection between the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths and *pratītyasamutpāda* it is clear that the discovery of both is the *sine qua non* of an enlightened being. The *Mahāvastu*[19] confirms this when it identifies supreme and perfect enlightenment with knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, the complete destruction of the impurities (*āśrava*), the *pratītyasamutpāda* in direct and reverse order, and the four-fold *dharmoddāna* (i.e. impermanence, suffering, non-self, peace).

Now it may be noted that the two sequences of *pratītyasamutpāda* do not come into the range of the first and fourth Noble Truths and it may be objected that the doctrines are not fully compatible. If we look at these two particular truths, however we shall see that there is no real problem. The former is nothing more than a bold assertion of a fact, i.e. that everything is conditioned by suffering. The first truth then does not have the force of an explanatory statement. It is the second truth which explains the first. Thus, while the first and second members of the Four Noble Truth formulation are traditionally held to be separate, it is clear that the first, without the second, has little meaning from a soteriological point of view. The second illuminates the first and in a logical sense they collapse into one another. Similarly the relationship between the third and fourth Noble Truths may be simplified. The third, in its connection with the reversed

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16 *M.* ii. 32
api c'Udāyi, tiṭṭhatu pubbanto, tiṭṭhatu aparanto, dhammaṃ desassāmi; imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti; imass'uppādā idaṃ uppajjati; imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhatīti

17 Lamotte (1980).

18 *ibid.* p. 119.

19 *Mahāvastu* ii. 285.

pratītyasamutpāda formula, explains the mechanics by which cessation (*nirodha*) comes about. The fourth on the other hand is an elaboration of this fact with particular reference to the field of soteriology, for practicing the path (*mārga*) is equivalent to the gradual bringing about of an end to ignorance (*avidyā*) and its concomitants. In a sense therefore one may be justified in regarding the Buddha's earlier quoted statement that he proclaimed simply suffering and its cessation,[20] as a reference to two processes, i.e. the arising of ignorance and its cessation. In other words the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* is quite compatible with the Four Noble Truth doctrine and these two must hereafter be considered as interchangeable formulations representing the central Buddhist understanding of things.

Now each of the twelve links in the classical *pratītyasamutpāda* formula are said to be:

> impermanent (*anicca*), conditioned (*saṅkhata*), that which has arisen dependently (*paṭiccasamupanna*), that which has the nature of withering away (*khayadhamma*), that which has the nature of passing away (*vayadhamma*), that which has the nature of fading away (*virāgadhamma*) and that which has the nature of coming to cease (*nirodhadhamma*).[21]

The individual links therefore must not be considered as eternal and ultimate existents, but rather as factors which arise through the principle of dependency (*idappaccayatā*), the principle by which all the factors are related. Since the links are impermanent (*anicca*) they are consequently suffering (*dukkha*) and not self (*anattā*) for:

> That which is impermanent is suffering (*dukkha*). That which is suffering is not self (*anattā*) and that which is not-self is not mine (*na mama*) ... In this way one should see this as it really is (*yathābhūtam*) with right comprehension.[22]

Now the *Abhidhārmikas* further sub-divided the causal process outlined by the twelve linked *pratītyasamutpāda* in such a way that the whole of reality may be understood as the interplay between 75 or so factors of existence (*dharma*). One might call them fundamental building blocks. In consequence dependently originated things, cognised through the eyes of ignorance (*avidyā*) must, for the *Abhidharma*, be considered as unreal. This false understanding, identified with the forward sequence of *pratītyasamut-*

20 cf. n. 15 *supra*.

21 *S*. ii. 26.
katame ca bhikkhave paṭiccasamuppannā dhammā. jarāmaraṇaṃ bhikkhave aniccaṃ saṅkhataṃ paṭiccasamuppannam khayadhammaṃ vayadhammaṃ virāgadhammaṃ nirodhadhamma jāti bhikkhave aniccā...

22 *S*. iii. 22
yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ, yaṃ dukkhaṃ tad anattā, yad anattā taṃ n'etaṃ mama n'eso 'haṃ asmi na m'eso attāti evaṃ etaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ

padā and hence with the Second Noble Truth leads to suffering (*duḥkha*) and its associated conditions of old age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*). However the abolition of this diseased vision of things leads to the understanding that dependently originated things are not ultimately real since they are in fact constructed out of the true building blocks of reality; i.e. the 75 (or so) *dharmas*. For the *Abhidharma* then, the reversal sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda* brings about the realisation that the world of dependently originated things (i.e. people, houses etc.) is unreal. The true state of affairs is nothing more than a causal interplay of the *dharmas*. When the *Abhidhārmika* sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) he penetrates their conventional form and understands their ultimate *dharmic* reality.

This is not necessarily in conformity with the teachings of the *Nikāyas*. This is because the *Abhidhārmika* must accept his ultimately real *dharmas* as being devoid of suffering (*sukha*), permanent (*nitya*) and possessing self (*ātman*). To use *Mahāyānist* language, the *Abhidhārmika* is committed to the view that *dharmas* possess substantiality or own-being (*svabhāva*). Such a position is at odds with that held in the early period of Buddhist thought where all things (*dhammā*) are conclusively taught to be devoid of self (*anattā*).[23] It seems likely then that when the Buddha talks about seeing things as they really are (*yathābhūtam*), he is not referring to a *dharma* theory such as the one outlined in the texts of the *Abhidharma*.

It is clear from a variety of texts that a person is only capable of seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) when in a state of mind inaccessible to the ordinary person. In other words, seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) is not synonymous with ordinary sense perception. It is a different stage of consciousness. Now we are told that:

> It is the true nature of things (*dhammatā*) that a person in the state of (meditative) concentration knows and sees what really is (*yathābhūtam*).[24]

Jayatilleke interprets this to mean that seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) is entirely natural. It is not a supernatural occurrence.[25] He intimates that the term *dhammatā* simply means "it is natural that...". This may be true in many instances of the appearance of the word "*dhammatā*", and in fact Rahula[26] has demonstrated this to be so. However it is difficult to believe that in this particular instance the Buddha is saying that it is natural for people to be in meditative states which lead to seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*), when this is self-evidently not the case. The overwhelming majority of people do not see things as they are, according

23 *Dhammapada*. v. 279
sabbe dhammā anattā cf. *A*. i. 286

24 *A*. v. 3
dhammatā esā... yaṃ samāhito yathābhūtam jānāti passati

25 Jayatilleke *op. cit.* p. 420–21.

26 Rahula (1974)

to Buddhism. A more accurate rendition of this passage, gives seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) as equivalent to seeing the true nature of things (*dhammatā*). This interpretation has the benefit of avoiding Jayatilleke's rendering, but also corresponds more with other canonical references to the connection between *yathabhūtam* and *dhammatā*. Following on from our previous quotation the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* holds that one who sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) experiences the knowledge and insight of emancipation (*vimuttiñāṇadassana*).[27] This particular attainment is often synonymous with *paññā*.[28] One is led to conclude that what is "seen" in *paññā* must be the true nature of things (*dhammatā*). For the *Abhidhārmikas* the term *dharmatā* refers to the *dharmic* constituents of reality. In this instance the person capable of engaging *paññā* penetrates through the outward form into the essential *dharmic* structure of the object. However it is unclear that *yathābhūtam* means this in the *suttas*. What is more likely is that the vision of *dharmatā* is a vision of reality in which ignorance (*avidyā*) has been uprooted, so that things are no longer obscured, but revealed in their true state, i.e. as they are (*yathābhūtam*). This kind of understanding is certainly contained in metaphorical form in the *Nikāyas*. The statement:

> ... just as if a man possessed of sight were to observe the reflection of his face in a basin of water disturbed, shaken, tossed about by wind and full of ripples, but fail to know and see (his face) as it really is (*yathābhūtam*).[29]

distinguishes between a distorted and undistorted vision of the face. We are led to infer that seeing things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) means seeing things unencumbered by any defect. Now while the *Abhidharmic* world view obviously coincides with this notion to a certain extent, there is no evidence in the *Nikāyas* that a view of things devoid of distortion coincides with a knowledge of the *dharmic* constitution of reality. Rather the sense being conveyed is one in which a form of the correspondence theory of truth holds good. However this is a correspondence theory with a difference, the difference being that knowledge only corresponds with the external object once a process of meditative training has been undergone. Before such training the external object will be distorted through ignorance and its concomitants. Keith recognises this when he says that:

> The Buddha, like the sage of the *Upaniṣad*, sees things as they truly are (*yathābhūtam*) by a mystic potency, which is quite other than reasoning of the discursive type.[30]

27 *A.* v. 3 cf. n. 24 *supra.*
28 Jayatilleke *op. cit.* p. 421.
29 *S.* v. 123
seyyathāpi... udapatto vāterito calito bhanto ūmijāto tattha cakkhumā puriso sakaṃ mukhanimittaṃ paccavekkhamāno yathābhūtaṃ na jāneyya na passeyya
30 Keith, A.B. *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon* Oxford (1923) p. 90

We have already noted that:

> ... mental concentration is the cause of knowing and seeing things as they are.[31]

and that such knowledge is sometimes referred to as *paññā* (*prajñā*). We may conclude this section by asserting that *paññā* reveals things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) and that this knowledge is knowledge of the true nature of things (*dharmatā*). Since such knowledge is totally unobstructed by ignorance (*avidyā*), and its concomitants, it is ultimately true:

> Knowing things as they are, wherever they are, is the highest knowledge.[32]

Ultimate truth comes about through the application of a form of practice which leads to the destruction of the forward sequence of the *pratītyasamutpāda*. Taking up Keith's notion of a "mystic potency" however, one must not assume that the attainment corresponds to the *Upaniṣadic* realisation of the absolute primacy of the monistic *Brahman*. For the Buddhist *prajñā* reveals a real world independent of thought construction (*vikalpa*), and false dichotomy (*prapañca*), both of which are engendered by ignorance (*avidyā*). Since ignorance has been eradicated the knowledge of things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) indicates:

> ... what exists as "existing" and what does not exist as "not existing".[33]

In other words, the reversal sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda* destroys the misconception of reality but does not negate reality itself. Neither does it replace reality with an ontological absolute such as *Brahman*.

The canon recognises three forms of *prajñā*:[34] that arising from the teaching (*śrutamayi*), that based on reflection (*cintāmayi*) and that born from meditation (*bhāvanāmayi*), though only the last of the three brings about a total and complete freedom from *saṃsāra*. Commenting on the third form of *prajñā*, which he calls wisdom devoid of impediment (*prajñā anāsravā*), Yaśomitra maintains that in such a state the object is perceived directly (*pratyakṣārthatvāt*), excluding any inductive knowledge (*ānumānikajñāna*). This *prajñā* is non-subjective (*ādhimokṣikajñāna*), has an object which is real (*bhūtārthatvāt*) and is consequently pure (*viśuddhā*).[35] From all that has been said, one may conclude that an objective world, sometimes referred to as the true nature of things (*dharmatā*), or its synonym *dhar-*

31 *S*. ii. 30
yathābhūtañāṇadassanassa upanisā samādhi

32 *A*. v. 37
etad anuttariyam...ñāṇānaṃ yadidaṃ tattha tattha yathābhūtañāṇam

33 *A*. v. 36
santaṃ vā atthī'ti ñassati asantaṃ vā natthī 'ti ñassati

34 *D*. iii. 219 and *Vibhaṅga* 324–325

35 *Kośavyākhyā* p. 580–581
cf. Wogihara, U. *(ed.) Sphutārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* 2 vols Tokyo (1971)
Quoted in Lamotte *op. cit.* p. 127.

madhātu, is revealed to the knowledge of one who has completed the Buddhist path, which consists in engaging the reversal sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

A hint that the true nature of things relates to a world independent of thought, is contained in the Buddha's condemnation of the idealistic viewpoint of Sāti Bhikkhu, who contends that:

> In so far as I understand the *Dharma* taught by the Buddha, it is this consciousness (*viññāṇa*) itself that runs on fares on, not another.[36]

Now since *Dharma* is itself a synonym for *pratītyasamutpāda*, it must be the case that the latter should not be understood as the running on of *vijñāna*. It seems that Jayatilleke[37] was correct to assign an objective existence to *pratītyasamutpāda*. In its forward sequence it is the cause of the distorted vision equivalent to that of an unenlightened being, while in its reversal sequence it reveals the true nature of things (*dharmatā*) consistent with the vision of the enlightened. This true nature of things is sometimes referred to as element (*dhātu*) or suchness (*tathatā*).

Let us now turn to the *Mahāyāna* understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* to determine how, or if, it differs from what has already been stated. In the case of Nāgārjuna *pratītyasamutpāda* is clearly central. He opens *MMK* by stating:

> I bow down to the Buddha, the best of teachers, who taught the dependent origination, free from dichotomous thought and auspicious (*śivaṃ*), being without destruction or production, neither created nor eternal, neither differentiated nor undifferentiated and without coming or going.[38]

Expanding this key statement one may say that Nāgārjuna accepts the teaching we have already discussed in which the central event in the career of the Buddha was the discovery of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Nāgārjuna elaborates the doctrine by stating that *pratītyasamutpāda* should not be understood in a dogmatic sense since this method relies on the construction of false dichotomies. Implicit in such a position is the idea that one must maintain a middle course in order to come to a true understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda*. This idea is made explicit in the course of *MMK* so that at one point the Buddhist path is actually connected to

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36 *M.* i. 256
tathā'haṃ bhagavatā dhammaṃ desitaṃ ājānāmi yathā
tad ev'idaṃ viññāṇaṃ sandhāvati saṃsarati anaññan 'ti

37 cf. n. 3 *supra*.

38 *MMK.* 1
anirodhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvataṃ
anekārthamanānārthamanāgamamanirgamaṃ
yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ prapañcopaśamaṃ śivaṃ
deśayāmāsa saṃbuddhastaṃ vande vandatāṃ varaṃ

pratītyasamutpāda in the sense that correct understanding of this concept is the goal of the spiritual life.

> Dependent origination we call emptiness. This is metaphorical designation and is, indeed, the middle path.[39]

Any attempt to put into words such a realisation can be nothing more than a metaphorical designation (*prajñaptirupādāya*).

When it comes to a more precise understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* it is clear that Nāgārjuna rejects the doctrine of the *Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma*. We have noted that the latter system depends upon the presupposition that each factor of existence possesses substantiality or own-being (*svabhāva*). The problem with such a view is that the causal process implied in the *pratītyasamutpāda* doctrine runs into difficulties. If things are totally self-existent, how can they be causally related to anything else? This central paradox of the *Abhidhārmika* system is at the crux of Nāgārjuna's argument as presented in *MMK*, an argument which rejects the innovations of the *Abhidhārmikas* while preserving the fundamental doctrines of *pratītyasamutpāda* which we have already isolated from the *Nikāyas*. Thus Nāgārjuna tells his opponent, who one assumes must be putting forward to *Abhidharmic* position,

> At nowhere and at no time can entities ever exist by originating out of themselves, from others, from both,or from a lack of causes ... In relational conditions the self-nature of entities cannot exist.[40]

Since one must accept dependent origination, and hence causality, [this being axiomatic to the whole Buddhist system], the idea of self-existent entities (*dharmasvabhāva*) have to be rejected. Entities must be empty (*śūnya*) of self nature (*svabhāva*). The opponent seizing on his opportunity contends that if Nāgārjuna denies the self-existence of entities,then he must accordingly accept the non-existence of the Four Noble Truths. In other words Nāgārjuna appears as a soteriological nihilist. This is an unreasonable charge, for a state of being devoid of own-being (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) is not synonymous with non-existence. Nāgārjuna responds to his opponent by showing that it is he who does not understand the true significance of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Nāgārjuna goes on to maintain that:

> Any factor of existence which does not participate in relational origination cannot exist. Therefore, any factor of experience not in the nature of *śūnya* cannot exist.[41]

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39 *MMK*. xxiv. 18
yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracaksmahe
sa prajñaptirupādāya pratipatsaiva madhyamā

40 *MMK*. i. 1 and 3a
na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ
utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana ke cama ...
na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāṃ pratyayādiṣu vidyate

Actually, it is the acknowledgement of the emptiness of entities (*dharmas*) which really allows the positing of dependent origination at all. The system of the *Abhidhārmikas* then, by adherence to own-being (*svabhāva*), makes nonsense of the Four Noble Truths.

> If everything were of the nature of non-*śūnya*, then there would be neither production nor destruction ... Where could suffering in the nature of non-relational origination arise? ... the extinction of suffering in terms of self-nature does not happen ... If the way to enlightenment possesses self-nature, then its practice will not be possible.[42]

The acceptance of such a doctrine precludes the notion of Buddhahood

> According to your assertion, anyone who is not a Buddha in virtue of self-existence cannot hope to attain enlightenment even by serious endeavour or by the path of the *Bodhisattva*.[43]

By implication the *Abhidhārmika* falls into the same camp as those teachers such as Makkhali Gosāli and Pūraṇa Kassapa whose teachings are without a basis (*ahetuvāda*). Further, by asserting own-being (*svabhāva*), the *Abhidhārmikas* negate the possibility of a graduated path to enlightenment and preclude any notion of causality, since:

> From the standpoint of self-existence, the world will be removed from the various conditions and it will be non-originative, non-destructive and immovable.[44]

At the end of the chapter in *MMK* dealing with the Four Noble Truths , Nāgārjuna affirms a central idea we have already discussed with reference to the *Nikāyas*, i.e. that the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula is interchangeable with the Four Noble Truths. Nāgārjuna accepts the centrality of these two doctrines and goes on to add that without an understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* the Four Truths will remain a mystery:

> One who rightly discerns dependent origination will, indeed, rightly discern suffering, its origination, its extinction,and the path to enlightenment.[45]

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41 *MMK*. xxiv. 19
apratītyasamutpanno dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate
yasmāt tasmād aśūnyo hi dharmaḥ kaścin na vidyate

42 *MMK*. xxiv. 20a, 21a, 23a, 24a
yadyaśūnyamidaṃ sarvamudayo nāsti na vyayah...
apratītyasamutpannaṃ kuto duḥkhaṃ bhaviṣyati....
na nirodhaḥ svabhāvena sato duḥkhasya vidyate...
svabhāvye sati mārgasya bhāvanā nopapadyate

43 *MMK*. xxiv. 32
yaścābuddhaḥ svabhāvena sa bodhāya ghaṭann api
na bodhisattvacaryāyāṃ bodhiṃ te'dhigamiṣyati

44 *MMK*. xxiv. 38
ajātamaniruddhaṃ ca kūṭasthaṃ ca bhaviṣyati
vicitrābhir avasthābhiḥ svabhāve rahitaṃ jagat

45 *MMK*. xxiv. 40

The implication in all of this must be that, whether one understands reality to be comprised of entities such as people, mountains, houses, etc. (i.e. the commonsense view), or of more fundamental building blocks like the *dharmic* constituents of reality (the position of the *Abhidhārmikas*), one is still attached to an essentialist view of things. These views both rely on the idea of self-existent entities possessing own-being (*svabhāva*), a view which Nāgārjuna has shown to be erroneous since it does not conform with the central discovery of the Buddha, i.e. that things are mutually dependent. This being so, the world view of a person holding to these theories is deluded. Only the understanding of reality in terms of *pratītyasamutpāda*, i.e. on the basis of entities (*dharma*) devoid of own being (*niḥsvabhāvatā*), leads, through eradication of ignorance (*avidyā*), to the seeing of things as they are (*yathābhūtam*).

In *MMK*, the twelve fold formula of *pratītyasamutpāda* is dealt with in the traditional manner, first in the forward sequence and then in the reverse. Once again the forward sequence, beginning with ignorance, is shown to lead to *saṃsāric* states of existence.

> Those who are deluded by ignorance create their own threefold mental conformations in order to cause rebirth and by their deeds go through the various forms of life (*gati*).[46]

The threefold conformations (*tridhāsaṃskārāḥ*) are those of body, speech and mind. The process initiated by ignorance (*avidyā*) leads inexorably on to old-age, death etc. This is in complete conformity with the formulae of the *Nikāyas*. Nāgārjuna adds:

> Consequently, the ignorant creates the mental conformations (*saṃskārāḥ*) which form the basis of *saṃsāric* life. Thus the ignorant is the doer while the wise, seeing the true state of things (*tattva*), does not create.[47]

The initiation of the reversal sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda* is a necessary preliminary for someone to enter the state of the wise. Through this process one understands the true state of things (*tattva*). The uprooting of the links in *pratītyasamutpāda*, a gradual process brought about through the cultivation of the Buddhist path, leads to the extinction of the states of existence characterised by suffering.

> when ignorance ceases mental conformations (*saṃskārāḥ*) do not come into being. The uprooting of ignorance is dependent on the knowledge (*jñāna*) of

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yaḥ pratītyasamutpādam paśyatīdam sa paśyati
duḥkhaṃ samudayaṃ caiva nirodhaṃ mārgaṃeva ca

46 *MMK*. xxvi. 1
punarbhavāya saṃskārān avidyānivṛtas tridhā
abhisaṃskurute yāṃs tair gatiṃ gacchati karmabhiḥ

47 *MMK*. xxvi. 10
saṃsāramūlān saṃskārān avidvān saṃskartoy ataḥ
avidvān kārakaḥ tasmān na vidvāṃs tattva darśanāt

practicing (*bhāvaṇa*) [the Buddhist path]. By the cessation of every [link of *pratītyasamutpāda*] none functions. Thus this single mass of suffering is completely extinguished.[48]

From what we have said with regard to Nāgārjuna's understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda*, it is clear that he follows very closely the form of doctrine found in the *Nikāyas*. Both sources regard the dependent origination as central to the Buddhist experience and both regard it as essential to the understanding of the enlightened and the unenlightened states. If one could isolate any innovation in the doctrinal development of Nāgārjuna it would be his implied negative criticism of the *Abhidhārmikas*, and his insistence on the notion of emptiness. While the *Nikāyas* and Nāgārjuna recognise the unenlightened state to be one characterised by ignorance (*avidyā*), dichotomous thought (*prapañca*), thought construction (*vikalpa*) etc., Nāgārjuna adds the important proviso that the enlightened state may not be understood according to the *Abhidharmic* system for all things must, once ignorance has been uprooted, be empty of all conceptions, including the conception of own-being (*svabhāva*). Only then will the true objective state of things (*tattva* = *dharmatā* = *tathatā*) be seen as it is (*yathābhūtam*). For Nāgārjuna then, this is the meaning of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). He uses emptiness as a synonym for *pratītyasamutpāda*.[49] As Yamada says:

> Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), then, is not another entity or absolute on which dharmas are based or from which phenomenal existences originate, but it is a ... principle of how the most concrete things exist in the matrix of factors of existence, which are related interdependently and which are present at the eternal now and boundaryless here.[50]

On turning to the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) in the writings of the *Yogācāra*, one is immediately conscious of the desire, shown by some modern scholars, to effect a radical distinction between the interpretation of this concept by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and that of the *Madhyamaka*. Stcherbatsky, for instance, maintains that Asaṅga's *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* was written to indicate the middle course between the extremes of the *Madhyamaka* and the *Sarvāstivāda*. However Stcherbatsky has no textual basis on which to form such an opinion. Sthiramati, commenting on the text, reveals that the two extremes being avoided by Asaṅga are firstly the blanket denial of everything (*sarvāpavādapratiṣedhārthaṃ*),[51]

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48 *MMK.* xxvi. 11–12
avidyāyāṃ niruddhāyāṃ samskārāṇām asaṃbhavaḥ
avidyāyā nirodhas tu jñānenasyaiva bhāvanāt
tasya tasya nirodhena tat tan nābhipravartate
duḥkhaskandhaḥ kevalo 'yam evaṃ samyag nirudhyate

49 cf. *MMK.* xxiv. 18; cf. n. 39 *supra*.

50 Yamada (1977) p. 277

and secondly the belief that form (*rūpa*) etc., is substantial (*dravyata*) and hence exists independently of the mind and its concomitants (*citta-caittāḥ*).[52] The first extreme is clearly the extreme of nihilism (*ucche-davāda*), which we have already shown to be avoided by the *Madhyamaka*, so Stcherbatsky is quite incorrect in asserting that Asaṅga's doctrine is at odds with the *Madhyamaka* on this point. There is more reason for maintaining that the second position is one held by the *Sarvāstivāda*. Nevertheless when Sthiramati points out that Asaṅga's doctrine avoids extremes he may merely be indicating that, along with all other mainstream Buddhist authors, Asaṅga steers a middle course between the nihilism and eternalism of the non-Buddhist systems. There is no evidence that it is in Asaṅga's mind to condemn the doctrines of other Buddhists.

Asaṅga's position on *pratītyasamutpāda* is actually tied up with another concept we have mentioned before. This is the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*). In the texts, this term is said to steer clear of the two extremes since it exists, though it is free of duality.[53] In other words, *abhūtaparikalpa* does not imply nihilism since it is an existent, yet at the same time it is non-eternal because it is devoid of the subject/object (*grāhyagrāhaka*) dichotomy which gives rise to the notion of eternal, substantial entities. One might say that it is devoid of the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*). At another place *abhūtaparikalpa* is given as a synonym for *paratantrasvabhāva*[54] the dependent nature, the second of the three natures propounded by the *Yogācāra*.

We have already dealt with the three natures in the previous chapter. We found that *paratantra* has a pivotal role in the theory. It can be externalised through imaginative activity as the imagined nature (*parikal-pitasvabhāva*), while in it pristine condition it is necessarily uncontaminated. In this circumstance it is referred to as the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*). The accomplished nature of course represents a level of knowledge in which independent existence of self and other are precluded and there is perfect union of knower and known, epistemology and ontology. In this state things are seen as they are (*yathābhūtam*). This is conveyed by the *Triṃśikā*:

> The accomplished nature is the latter's (i.e. the dependent nature's) perpetual devoidness of the former (i.e. the imagined nature).[55]

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51 Sthiramati *Madhyāntavibhāgasūtrabhāṣyatīka*, Bhattacharya and Tucci (eds.) p. 9.20

52 *ibid.* p. 10.9–10
athavā cittacaittasika rūpato dravyataśca santīti yeṣām dṛṣṭisteṣāṃ pratiṣedhārtha-muktaṃ

53 *MV.* 1.2a
abhūtaparikalpo'sti dvayam tatra na vidyate cf. ch. 6, n. 68. *supra*.

54 *MVBh.* 1.6.
abhūtaparikalpaḥ paratantrasvabhāvaḥ

Reality (*tattva*) may of course be incorrectly cognised through the eyes of ignorance. Conversely, when purged of ignorance it is seen as it is (*yathābhūtam*). One would expect the latter manner of "seeing" to be described by words such as *tathatā, dharmatā, śūnyatā* etc., if what we have already noted in earlier texts on the *pratītyasamutpāda* doctrine was also taken up by the *Yogācāra*. This is in fact the case. Let us concentrate our attention on one text, the *Madhyāntavibhaṅga*. This text has an unusual version of the twelve limbed formula. The author maintains that:

> This world (*jagat*) is defiled by (i) being concealed, (ii) being raised, (iii) being led, (iv) being seized, (v) being completed, (vi) being trebly determined, (vii) enjoying, (viii) being attracted, (ix) being bound, (x) being orientated and (xi–xii) being subjected to suffering.[56]

and Vasubandhu, in his commentary (*bhāṣya*) on these two verses, gives the traditional twelve members of the formula as alternatives to the ones given above, making it perfectly clear what Asaṅga is talking about. This discussion relates to the context of the dependent nature (*paratantra* = *abhūtaparikalpa*) being contaminated by the imagined nature (*parikalpita*). Under such circumstances:

> The imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*) is *citta* as well as *caittas* belonging to all the three worlds.[57]

since the imagination of the unreal (*abhūtaparikalpa*), like the dependent nature (*paratantra*) is the basis for the arising of ignorance, as has already been noted in the previous chapter. This quotation is actually highly reminiscent of a section of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*[58] which is considered canonical by both the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*. That the triple world is synonymous with an unenlightened world view contaminated by implications of own-being (*svabhāva*) to entities, and conditioned by ignorance (*avidyā*), is brought out by Sthiramati's commentary on this verse.

> *Citta* and *caittas* operate with reference to the own-nature and qualities of the things which though unreal are imagined.[59]

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55 *Triṃś.* 21b
niṣpannas tasya pūrvena sadā rahitatā tu yā

56 *MV.* 1. 11–12
chādanād ropaṇācca iva nayanāt saṃparigrahāt
pūraṇāt triparicchedād upabhogācca karṣanāt
nibandhanād ābhimukhyād duḥkhanāt kliśyate jagat
tredhā dvedhā ca samkleśaḥ saptadhā 'bhūtakalpanāt

57 *MV.* 1.8
abhūtaparikalpaśca citta caittās tridhātukāḥ

58 *Daśabhūmikasūtra* Rahder (ed.) p. 49c
cittamātraṃ idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukaṃ

59 *MVBhT.* 1.9
abhūtaparikalpya vastunaḥ svabhāvaviśeṣa

In fact exactly the same sentiments are expressed in the opening stanza of Vasubandhu's *Viṃśatikā*.

Let us now ascertain what relationship, if any, the three-nature doctrine has with the concept of dependent origination. As has already been noted, particularly with reference to the *maṅgalaśloka* of *MMK*, dependent origination defines the ontological condition of things prior to thought. This state of things is the case whether a Buddha exists or not. Using Whiteheadian terminology we may be tempted to suggest that, for the Buddhist, reality is a process. We know that another way in which *pratītyasamutpāda* is presented in the literature is as a forward and reverse sequence, respectively defining the process of bondage and release. We are now in the position to reconcile what appear on the surface as two irreconcilable notions. *Pratītyasamutpāda*, in the first sense of ontological process, is objectified as a mass of discrete, substantial entities. This movement away from initial integrity is put in train by ignorance (*avidyā*) and leads to suffering (*duḥkha*). This is the forward sequence of the formula. However, by taking the appropriate measures (i.e. following the Buddhist path) an individual may destroy his or her ignorance and restore the original integrity. This is accomplished by initiating the reversal sequence and leads to *nirvāṇa*. In this state no differentiation exists. Consequently we must not assume that *nirvāṇa* is a form of knowledge in which an external reality is presented to the senses, for in this state epistemology and ontology may be said to have collapsed.

> From the non-perception of the duality [of subject/object] there arises the perception of the *dharmadhātu*. From the perception of the *dharmadhātu* there arises the perception of unlimitedness.[60]

This is unsurpassed enlightenment. Vasubandhu identifies the perception of the *dharmadhātu* with the purging of imagination from perception. The imagined nature corresponds to the forward sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda*. The extirpation of imagination returns the dependent (*paratantra*) to its pristine condition as the accomplished (*parinispanna*), for the accomplished is nothing more that the dependent in its non-contaminated form, completely devoid of all dichotomies. The accomplished nature then represents the dawning of *prajñā* which Vasubandhu terms supramundane knowledge (*lokottarajñāna*), since it transcends the world view presented in imagination. Having overcome the false dichotomies on which such a world view is based this supramundane knowledge, or state of realisation, is:

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parikalpanayā cittacaittānām pravṛttatvāt

60 *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa (TSN)* 37
dvayor anupalambhena dharmadhātūpalambhatā
dharmadhātūpalambhena syādvibhutva upalambhatā

> ... the pure element (*anāsravadhātu*), incomprehensible, auspicious and unchangeable, being delightful it is the emancipated body (*vimuktikāya*) which is also called the *dharma* of the great sage.[61]

The accomplished nature (*parinispannasvabhāva*) of the *Yogācāra* then is quite interchangeable with the completion of the reversal sequence of *pratītyasamutpāda*. Both represent identical forms of spiritual attainment, and both merely restore the integrity of the initial, indeterminate and undifferentiated condition of things. All the synonyms that we are accustomed to associate with this state are found with reference to the accomplished nature. Vasubandhu for instance says that, since it is totally devoid of any false dichotomies, it reveals:

> The ultimate state of things (*dharmānaṃ paramārtha*) and this is also (called) suchness (*tathatā*).[62]

At this stage one realises that, up to this point, one has taken the products of discursive thought to be real (*vijñaptimātratā*). One attains an understanding of things devoid of thought construction (*nirvikalpajñāna*) and sees things as they are (*yathābhūtadarśaṇa*).[63]

We noted in the last chapter that Asaṅga held *pratītyasamutpāda* and *paratantra* to be synonymous. It is now clear why this is so. They both operate in a way that makes sense of the worldly discrimination between the ignorant and the enlightened state. The explanation of these two states is undertaken with either *pratītyasamutpāda* or *paratantra* as the central term in all the Buddhist writings we have examined, be they the *Nikāyas*, or the writings of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. All our authors then recognise the centrality of *pratītyasamutpāda/paratantra*, that unpredictable state of things which provides the rationale for the arising of bondage/release, *svabhāvatā/śūnyatā, saṃsāra/nirvāṇa*, defilement/purification, *saṃvṛti/paramārtha, duḥkha/ sukha, parikalpita/pariṣnispanna*, etc. The first half of each set represents an epistemic falling away and consequent objectification of the real state of things, while the second, as the uprooting of the first, reveals things in such a way that the distinction between epistemology and ontology no longer holds. Because of the inherent contradictions of language the state referred to by the second part of the pair is inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*) and can never be known in the way things of the world are known, for true understanding transcends the subject/object dichotomy. Since reality is essentially empty (*śūnya*) of all predicates one can only speak metaphorically about it;

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61 *Triṃś*. 30
sa eva anāśravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ
sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yaṃ mahāmuneḥ

62 *Triṃś*. 25a
dharmāṇām paramārthaśca sa yatas tathatā api saḥ

63 cf. *Vasubandhubhāṣya* and *Sthiramatiṭīka* on *Triṃś*. 28.

> Suchness, the extreme limit of existence, the uncaused, absoluteness, the *dharma-dhātu*; these are summarily the synonyms of emptiness.[64]

The alternative is to use the apophatic terminology charcteristic of negative mysticism.

It is clear that the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* provides the key to the understanding of the two fold truth doctrine, the three nature teachings, and their eventual harmonisation. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is reality as such, unpredictable in terms of existence or non-existence. This is confirmed by the Buddha's statement that it exists independently of the rising of a Buddha, by Nāgārjuna's *maṅgalaśloka* of *MMK* which merely reiterates the previous statement, and by the *Yogācāra* doctrine of the dependent nature (*paratantra*). In its defiled state this base (*āśraya*) proliferates in twelve stages, according to the twelve fold *pratītyasamutpāda* formula, through the agency of ignorance. This gives rise to *saṃsāra*, the imputation of own-being (*svabhāva*) to entities, the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), or the imagined nature (*parikalpita*), since all are synonymous. However, when the twelve stages are reversed, ignorance is uprooted. As a result *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) and the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpanna*) are achieved. Here again, these are all synonyms. Having achieved this state one understands things as they are, devoid and therefore empty (*śūnya*) of previously imputed substantiality (*svabhāva*). Things are now known to be mutually dependent (*pratītyasamutpāda*).

When all is said and done the understanding of the distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, etc., can only come about as the result of following the Buddhist path and not through philosophical discourse. As Nāgārjuna has it:

> All perceptions as well as false dichotomies are [essentially] of the nature of cessation and quiescence. No *dharma* whatsoever of any kind was ever taught by the Buddha.[65]

For the enlightened person reality itself is not an object of knowledge for such knowledge presuppose the possibility of articulation. The *gnosis* of the Buddha has no object. The Buddha is ultimately silent.

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64 *MV.* 1. 14
tathatā bhūtakoṭiś cānimittaṃ paramārthatā
dharmadhātuśca paryāyāḥ śūnyatāyāḥ samāsataḥ

65 *MMK.* xxv. 24
sarvopalambhopaśamaḥ prapañcopaśamaḥ śivaḥ
na kvacit kasyacit kaścid dharmo buddhena deśitaḥ

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PROBLEM OF IDEALISM

There are many sections of the Pali *Tripiṭaka* which, on casual scrutiny give the impression that an idealistic line is being put forward. The opening stanza of the *Dhammapada*,[1] for instance, asserts that things (*dhamma*) are dependent on mind (*manas*). Mind then seems the primary existent while *dharmas* are secondary. Similarly, at another point we hear that:

> By mind (*citta*) the world is controlled, by mind it is emancipated. By this one element, of the mind alone, are all things secured.[2]

or again:

> O *Bhikkhu*, the world is led by mind (*citta*), by mind is it drawn along. When mind has arisen it (i.e. the world) goes under its sway.[3]

There is a strong flavour here of a doctrine which we find much repeated in the *Mahāyāna*, finding its classical formulation in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, to the effect that:

> This triple world is nothing but mind (*cittamātra*).[4]

Now we have already stated that the evidence of such quotations is not sufficient to make the charge of idealism stick. It will be our present task to examine this problem in a little more detail.

The opening stanza of the *Dhammapada* continues by claiming mind (*citta*) to be the base for defilement and purification,[5] a doctrine which is supported by reference to other sections of the *Tripiṭaka*. Thus

> By the defilement of the mind (*citta*) are beings defiled; by the purification of the mind (*citta*) are beings purified.[6]

We understand from this that the mind (*citta/manas vijñāna*—since ac-

1 *Dhammapada*. v. 1.
manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā
manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā
tato naṃ dukkhaṃ anveti cakkhaṃ'va vahato padaṃ

2 *S*. i. 39
cittena nīyati loko, cittena parikissati
cittassa ekadhammassa sabbeva vasam anvagūti

3 *A*. ii. 177
cittena kho bhikkhu lokoniyyati cittena parikassati
cittassa uppannassa vasaṃ gacchatīti

4 *Daśabhūmika* Rahder (ed.) p. 49e
cittamātraṃ idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukaṃ

5 n.1 *supra*.

6 *S*. iii. 151
cittasaṃkilesā bhikkhave sattā saṃkilissanti cittavodānā sattā visujjhanti

cording to the Buddha all terms are synonymous[7]) is capable of grasping things from a defiled or a purified point of view depending on its own condition. This is entirely in conformity with the view we formed in the last chapter when we considered the general features of the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula in both early Buddhism and in the *Mahāyāna*. Things (*dharma*) themselves are not totally constructed by mind, but rather the mind has a structure which permits two basic epistemological orientaitons towards an external reality. As we have reiterated many times already, when the mind operates under the condition of ignorance (*avidyā*) the world picture becomes distorted as the result of a complex of karmic causes—this is the aspect of defilement. However, when ignorance has been eradicated the mind operates in its wisdom (*prajñā*) mode, a mode in which transformations of one kind or another cease to come into being and things appear as they are (*yathābhūtam*).

What becomes apparent is that Buddhism, since it accepts the possibility of a revolution in the way we actually see the world, may not be easily defined in terms abstracted from Western philosophical discourse. This is because Western systems, both secular and religious, generally fail to accept the notion of the perfectibility of man to the extent that it is employed in the East. Buddhism, in consequence, may only be apprehended by Western thought forms when small portions of it are examined *in vacuo*. In a partial sense we may decide that the Buddhist understanding of the workings of the unenlightened mind approximates to certain sense-datum theories of contemporary philosophy, while again we may feel that the treatment of the enlightened state is conducive to a more realistic interpretation. Nevertheless the overall package presented by Buddhist thought has a structure quite different to that of mainstream Western systems of thought. We will be wise therefore to treat this pattern of thought in a manner which keeps such matters in mind.

For the Buddhist, external reality exists, but not in a way which can be usefully articulated from the soteriological point of view. The mind similarly exists, though the precise nature of its form of existence is likewise problematic. The mind does seem to possess a variable structure . We may imagine it metaphorically as a mirror which, under certain conditions [i.e. those conducive to wisdom (*prajñā*)], produces an accurate image of externality. However, should conditions change the structure of the mirror loses is immaculacy. It becomes dislocated and distorted, and produces images much the same as those generated by the crazy mirrors popular in fairgrounds.

The early Buddhists themselves imply just such a system of metaphors

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7 *S.* ii. 95
yaṃ ca kho etaṃ bhikkhave vuccati cittaṃ iti pi mano iti pi viññāṇaṃ iti pi...

to account for the enlightened and unenlightened states. In the *Nikāyas* we may note as an important seminal statement the fact that:

> This mind, O monks, is luminous though contaminated by adventitious defilements; that mind, O monks, is luminous since it is cleansed of adventious defilements.[8]

The notion of a naturally luminous mind is a metaphor quite analogous to the clear mirror we constructed above and was in fact an image used not only by the *Sthaviras* but also by the *Mahāsāṃghika*, *Andhaka* and *Vibhajyavāda*.[9] A similar idea, found in the Chinese *Āgamas*, also has its root in the Pali *Tripiṭaka*.

> Beings are defiled by the impurities of the mind and purified by the cleansing of the mind.[10]

The cleansed mind of this verse shows a remarkable correspondence to the luminous mind (*prabhāsvara citta*) of the previous extract, and it is interesting in this connection to note that Monier-Williams, in his Sanskrit-English dictionary, gives "enlightened" as one of the meanings of *prabhāsvara*. Though it is a metaphor for enlightenment there is no good reason to hold the *prabhāsvara citta* to be some sort of monistic absolute with a strongly idealistic flavour, such as Śaṇkara's *Brahman*. This would be totally unexpected anyway considering the traditional opposition of Buddhism to the speculative nature of *Upaniṣadic* systems.

Another synonym for the enlightened mind, very often associated with *prabhāsvara citta* is the innate mind (*citta prakṛti*). Takasaki holds that this concept was rejected by the *Sarvāstivāda*, but was nevertheless accepted by many schools including the *Theravāda*, *Vaibhāṣika*, *Vatsīputrīya* and the *Mahāsāṃghika*.[11] The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* actually equates the two in the statement that "the innate nature of mind is luminous"[12] and doctrines describing the mind (*citta*) in this manner are found throughout the history of the *Mahāyāna*, as well as in the earliest texts.

Other longer, and hence later, recensions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* elaborate the luminous mind (*prabhāsvara citta*) concept. The result is the

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8 *A*. i. 10
pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi uppakkiliṭṭam... pabhassaram idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ

9 Bareau (1955) pp. 67–68, 147, 175, 194.

10 *Samyukta Nikāya* (PTS: *S*. iii. 151)
cittasamkleśāt sattvāḥ saṃkliṣyante, cittavyavadānād viśuddhyante
cf. n. 6. *supra*.

11 Takasaki (1966) p. 34 n. 57

12 *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* Vaidya, P.L. (ed.) Darbhanga (1960) p. 3.18
prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā

idea that mind is devoid of the contamination of the defilements in its enlightened state.

> Śāriputra said, "What is it that the luminous mind consists of?" Subhūti replied, "The luminosity of the mind O Śāriputra is such that it is neither associated with passion nor non-associated with it. It is neither associated with hate, delusion, the irruptions, the obstructions, the residues, the hindrances and the false views nor non-associated with them".[13]

It is interesting to note here that we have a neither ... nor relationship between the luminous mind and its various contaminants and May makes the pertinent comment:

> De telles formules contradictoires apparaissent frequémment dans les *Prajñāpāramitā* et dans les ouvrages *Mādhyamika*, elles s'y réfèrent toujours au rapport *sui generis* qui existe entre la vérité empirique et la vérité absolue. Dans le cas particulier, la pensée (*citta*) peut-être associée, en vérité relative, avec les passions qui, rappelons-le, sont adventices (*āgantuka*), c'est-à-dire existent exclusivement sur le plan du relatif. Mais, en vérité absolue, l'autonomie de la pensée, sa limpidité, sa luminosité sont parfaites. On retrouvera dans le *Vijñānavāda* ce double point de vue, appliqué au *vijñāna*.[14]

May indicates the connection between this particular line of thought and the two truth doctrine of the *Madhyamaka*. There is an implicitly continuous development to be drawn out here. From May's statements one may trace a coherent line of thought leading from the *Nikāyas*, through *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Madhyamaka* which reaches its conclusion in the *Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda*. This is of course the line of development we have argued for throughout this book. While Nāgārjuna does not himself make the connection between the conventional truth (*saṃvṛti*) and the mind contaminated by adventitious defilements (*āgantukakleśa*), it is abundantly clear, particularly with reference to what has been said in chapter six above, that the conventional is the mentally constructed. This seems to be the gist of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, in particular the later ones, in which the idea of *saṃvṛti* is discussed. It is certainly the sense of the *Yogācāra* notion of the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*). In its uncontaminated, innately luminous, condition the mind reveals things as they are (*yathābhūtam*). The *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Madhyamaka* term this the ultimate point of view (*paramārtha*), while the *Yogācāra* (and incidentally the *Maitreya chapter* of the *Prajñāpāramitā*) calls such a state the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*). We have noted that, in their representative works, the

13 *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* Dutt, N. (ed.) London (1934) p. 121. 14–122.3
... prakṛtiś cittasya prabhāsvarā śāriputra āha kā punar āyuṣman subhūte cittasya prabhāsvaratā subhūtirāha yad āyuṣman śāriputra cittam na ragāgeṇa saṃyuktam na visamyuktaṃ na dveṣeṇa ... na moheṇa ... na paryuttānaiḥ nāvaranaiḥ ... nānuśayaiḥ ... na samyojanaiḥ ... na dṛṣṭikṛtaiḥ ... iyam śāriputra cittasya prabhāsvaratā.

14 May (1971) p. 273

authors of these "schools" acknowledge an intermediate ontological term which gives efficaciousness to the two states of mind. We may conclude that the doctrine of luminous mind (*prabhāsvaracitta*) acts in the same manner. In other words, the innate character of the mind is such that it gives an accurate picture of the world, despite the ubiquitous fact that mental states may be adversely conditioned so that knowledge becomes far from accurate.

In another *Mahāyāna* text, the *Samādhirājāsūtra*, the concept of the luminous mind is linked to the inverse *pratītyasamutpāda* formula. Here the luminosity of mind only appears once the conceptions (*saṃjñā*) which give rise to name and form (*nāma-rūpa*), etc., have been suppressed.[15] This seems to supports our viewpoint and, with what has already been said so far, conclusively demonstrates that the luminous mind is not a monistic absolute besides which all other existents have a dream-like status. It is rather a state of mind in which the processes associated with the unenlightened state have ceased. Quite apart from textual evidence, the doctrine cannot be in any way indicative of monism or idealism on grounds purely connected with internal consistency. If one accepts, and this appears to be axiomatic in Buddhism, that the vast majority of sentient beings, since they are bound to the cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) are unenlightened, while holding out the possiblity of enlightenment, one is forced to hold that there must be two possible states of mind; one veridical, the other not so. Now we noted in the previous chapter that Buddhism rejects those teachings without a basis (*ahetuvāda*), such as the *Ājīvaka* doctrines, which suggest that things come about indepently of causes. Since the luminous mind (*prabhāsvara citta*), though possibly innate, is still nevertheless only fully operative in a small minority of sentient beings (i.e. the enlightened), it cannot be a state of mind shared by all, for the corrolary of this would be that all beings are enlightened, which we have already admitted is axiomatically not so. The ignorant being moves to a state of wisdom (*prajñā*) by means of a gradual process, the Buddhist path, and not acausally. If this is so the luminous mind, since it is not fully shared by all in its fully operative sense, cannot be an all encompassing psychic entity like Jung's collective unconsciousness, but must refer to the condition of an individual's mind at a certain stage of spiritual development. One might say that it is a useful psychological metaphor for the soteriological goal of Buddhism. Lindtner regards this kind of metaphorical treatment as acceptable. In his commentary on Bhāvaviveka's *MRP*, and on the authority of Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, Kambala, and Dharmakīrti, he lists

15 *Samādhirājasūtra* in Dutt, N. (ed.) *Gilgit Manuscripts* Srinagar (1941–1954) Vol II. 2, p. 300.9–10
yasya ca mṛdukī saṃjñā nāmarūpasmi varttate
agṛdhraṃ nāmarūpasmi cittaṃ bhoṭi prabhāsvaraṃ

both *nirvāṇa* and *vijñāna prabhāsvaraṃ* as synonymous with *paramārtha-satya*.[16]

It may be argued that the contaminations of its luminosity, since they are adventitious (*āgantuka*), are never essentially part of the mind. In consequence its innate nature is never really defiled. Such a position would undoubtedly be adopted by some *Vedāntist* schools but this idea sits rather poorly on the Buddhist tradition. In the first place the preservation of the innate nature of mind greatly diminishes the disjunction between the enlightened and unenlightened state which as we have noted is axiomatic for Buddhism. Secondly, although it seems possible on the surface to construct a number of idealist positions, both monistic and pluralistic, on the basis of this doctrine one is still left with the problem of the defilements. Since they come from without they may not be mental phenomena at all and one is left wondering what status they may have. By accepting both an external reality, and individual minds capable of two fundamental epistemic orientations to that reality, some of the problems we have encountered disappear. Adventitious defilement may then be regarded as the result of minds, in their delusory mode, making initial contact with external reality. Of course this begs the question of how the delusory process started in the first place, but this and questions of a similar order, are never seriously entertained by the Buddhist tradition. The story of Malunkyaputta's questions and the Buddha's refusal to answer proves this point. Rather than speculating on questions concerning origins the Buddha relates a story of a man who, rather than accepting treatment for his ills, prefers to ask questions and dies as a result.

Before turning to the complex problem of whether in the *Yogācāra* the doctrine of mind gives rise to idealism, let us deal with one further doctrine of early Buddhism which has sometimes provoked such a charge. This is the teaching concerning the "limb of existence" (*bhavaṅga*). Now this term only occurs in one section of the Pali canon[17] where it is said to precede reflection (*āvajjana*) in the process of perception, but it is nevertheless extremely widespread in post-canonical writings, particularly the *Milinda-pañha, Visuddhimagga* and the *Abhidhamma* commentaries. The main purpose of the doctrine is to demonstrate that there is a continuous mental stream persisting throughout an individual's life processes which can be used to explain memory, the survival of a being throughout numerous lives, and the *karmic* consequences of past actions. A doctrine which only accepts the momentary sequence of self-contained points of consciousness (*kṣanavāda*) is of course unable to do this adequately. The recognition of the need for such a concept can be found in early canonical references to

16 Lindtner 'On Bhavya's *MRP*' ... (1984) p. 156–6.
17 *Patthānapakarana* II. pp. 34, 159, 160, 169.

the stream of consciousness (*viññāṇasota*), which seems to perform the same function here as *bhavaṅga* does in the later literature.

> ... he understands a man's stream of consciousness (*viññāṇasota*) as uninterrupted at both ends and supported both in this world and in the other world.[18]

It is the *viññāṇasota*, then, which allows the progress from one existence to another while still retaining an idea of continuity. This concept seems, in the early literature, to provide the psychological counterpart to the stream of existence (*bhavasota*), a notion which

> give(s) expression to the Buddhist philosphical concept of flux, of life considered as a flowing stream, never the same for any two consecutive moments (*S*.i.15 and *S*. iv. 128).[19]

However, there is little evidence in the early material that the authors had given much thought to the implications of their theories of mind. We find little speculation on the problems raised by the condition of mind of a person in deep sleep or deep meditation, when the standard theory of *viññāṇasota* is discussed. For instance, if the mind is a sequence of thought points, never the same for any two consecutive moments, how does it become re-established once the flow is interrupted by deep sleep etc.? Speculation of this sort was common among the *Brahmanic* thinkers who held that the state of deep, dreamless, sleep (*suṣuptāvasthā*) coincided with the primordial state of things (*prāgavasthā*).

> when a man sleeps he becomes united with that which is, Somya; he has gone into his own self.[20]

One cannot help but speculate, although there is little hard evidence to support such a view, that the Buddhist notion of *bhavaṅga* represents an attempt to explain deep psychological processes in response to *Brahmanic* objections, without at the same time falling into the absolute monist position of the *Upaniṣadic* sages. The latter would have been quite out of the question as the Buddhists would have been

> ... anxious to avoid making of *bhavaṅga* an unrelated, anoetic consciousness. To regard mind as the source of consciousness would be alien to the spirit of early Buddhism. Mind was always a conditional relationship. There could be no such thing as unconditioned mind... Consciousness always involves reference to an object.[21]

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18 *D*. iii. 105
purisassa ca viññāṇasotaṃ pajānāti ubhayato
abbocchinnaṃ idhaloke patiṭṭhitañ ca paraloke patiṭṭhitañ ca

19 *Encylopedia of Buddhism* Malasekera, G.P. (ed.) Ceylon, Government Press (1961–65) Vol. III, Fascicle I, p. 17 *Bhavaṅga*

20 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VI.8.1
yatraitat puruṣaḥ svapiṭi nāma satā saumya tadā
sampanno bhavati; svam apīto bhavati

It is in the quasi-canonical *Milindapañha* (c.100AD) that the problem seems first to have been tackled. Replying to the King's inquiries about the psychology of dreams and sleep, Nāgasena states that, for a man entered into a state of deep sleep, his thought (*citta*) has gone into *bhavaṅga*.[22] Now it should be noted that, in this example, the term *bhavaṅga* is only used with reference to the problem of dreams and deep sleep and we would be unjustified, in this instance, to extend its function to the carrying of *karmic* effects throughout long periods of time, or to providing a continuity of consciousness in the cycles of *saṃsāra*. Bearing this in mind, one may spot an important difference between the theory of *bhavaṅga* and *Upaniṣadic* notions. For the *Brahmanic* tradition a person in deep sleep is united with the true nature (*svarūpa*) of *Brahman*, which is pure being (*sat*).[23] However, in the present theory, when in a condition of deep sleep the mind (*citta*) has gone to *bhavaṅga*, this state is merely a limb or aspect (*aṅga*) of the universal flux of becoming (*bhava*). As Sarathchandra points out:

> The word [i.e. *bhavaṅga*] had ... the necessary dynamic import to distinguish it from the ideas of soul in the *Upaniṣads* and other systems of Indian thought.[24]

Bhavaṅga in fact avoids reference to any soul-theory by its close association with the dynamic theory of causation (*pratītyasamutpāda*) characteristic of Buddhism, while at the same time providing the possibility of understanding the continuity of consciousness and its concomitants. It seems probable that the elaboration of a comprehensive theory of mind along these lines was precipitated by arguments with rival schools, since:

> For the Buddha the matter was of no consequence. He was only intent upon showing that empirical consciousness was evil and could be stopped and that intuitional consciousness [i.e. *prajñā*] could be cultivated. He was not concerned with the problems of survival, and as far as it mattered to him, deep sleep might have been a mere physical state. But it was not possible for his adherents to maintain silence in the face of persistent questioning, particularly when all other systems were developing an elaborate metaphysic of their own.[25]

Now it would be a great mistake to take *bhavaṅga* to be equivalent to a permanent subconscious state as understood by contemporary Western psychological theory. In the *Abhidharmic* texts, in which the term appears frequently, it is quite clear that *bhavaṅga* is cut off when ratiocination takes place. *Bhavaṅga* merely represents mind in a passive condition, free from any thought processes (*vīthimutta*). When the mind becomes active

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21 *Encyclopedia of Buddhism op. cit.* p. 19

22 *Milindapañha* p. 299
middhasamārūḷhassa mahārāja cittaṃ bhavaṅgagataṃ hoti

23 cf. *Brahmasūtra* II 1.9

24 Sarathchandra (1943) p. 96–7.

25 *Encyclopedia of Buddhism op. cit.* p. 18–19

bhavaṅga is cut off (*bhavaṅgupaccheda*) and a new state known as the process of cognition (*vīthicitta*) takes over. *Bhavaṅga* is not a condition of mind underlying the cognitive processes. Once cognitive processes begin, *bhavaṅga* ceases, only to return when cognition has ceased.

Here we have a connection with the concepts of luminous mind (*prabhāsvaracitta*) and innate mind (*cittaprakṛti*). When in a state of *bhavaṅga* or *vīthimutti* the Kathāvatthu[26] holds that the mind is in its natural condition (*pakaticitta*), while the commentaries identify it as shining (*pabbassara*) and natural (*pakati*).[27] It appears that *bhavaṅga* represents a pure, uncontaminated phase of mental activity. It is to be distinguished from those periods in which cognition is actively taking place, which for the un-enlightened person involves ignorance (*avidyā*) and the production of *karma*. *Abhidharmic* treatises confirm this. We find that they hold the consciousness of a new-born child to be of the essential nature of *bhavaṅga* which flows undisturbed after birth until it is disrupted by the first burst of conscious thought precipitated by perception. From then on all conscious activities follow the same pattern. Thus, according to the *Abhidhammatthasangaha*:

> When a visible object enters the focus of vision, at the first moment of its existence, it would have no effect on the percipient (1). Next there is a vibration of the stream of *bhavaṅga (bhavaṅgacalana)* for two moments, and a consequent interruption of the flow (2,3). There is no *bhavaṅga* any more, and instead there begins a conscious process, the first step of which is the moment of adverting (*āvajjana*) (4). In the subsequent moments there follow in succession the visual impression (*cakkhuviññāṇa*), (5), recipient consciousness (*sampaṭicchana*), (6), investigating consciousness (*santīraṇa*) (7), determining consciousness (*voṭṭhabbana*), (8), seven moments of full perception (*javana*), (15), and finally two moments of retention of registering consciousness (*tadārammaṇa*), 17). This completes the seventeen moments and after that *bhavaṅga* begins to flow again until it is interrupted by a stimulus.[28]

Now the exact period of time supposed by the *Abhidhārmikas* to be equivalent to the 17 thought moments taken for this process to be completed, is of no particular importance to our present enquiry. However, the basic structure of the schema is, since it confirms our previous work. *Bhavaṅga* is disturbed by an external stimulus which ultimately leads to a period of full perception (*javana*). Now *javana* is held to have the property of volition (*cetanā*); in other words it gives rise to future *karmas*. In fact the relevant texts break down the seven *javana* moments into three groups

26 *KVu* p. 615

27 *AA*. i. 60; *DhsA*. 140; *KvuA*. 193

28 From *Abhidhammatthasangaha* IV.3 which summarises the stages:
ettāvatā cuddasa cittuppāda dve bhavaṅgacalanāni
pubbeva atītakam ekacittakkhaṇanti katvā sattarasa cittakkhaṇāni paripūrenti
Narada Thera (ed.) Rangoon 1970.

depending on their power to generate future *karmas*. The first moment of the seven is said to be weakest since it lacks any sustaining force and the *karmic* effect of this must necessarily operate in the present life only. The last moment is second weakest, its *karmic* effect only having the power to extend to the immediately subsequent life. The effects of the five remaining moments however are strong and held to operate at any time in the life continuum up until the final passing away (*parinirvāṇa*).

What is of interest in this doctrine from our point of view is the basic structure given to cognition. The flow of *bhavaṅga* is interrupted, initiating a process which leads progressively to *karma* generating perception (*javana*), after which the stream of consciousness lapses back into *bhavaṅga*. This description must refer to the process undergone by a mind conditioned by ignorance (*avidyā*), since for an enlightened being the twelve factors of *pratītyasamutpāda* have been uprooted and future *karmas* are not produced. One must assume that for an enlightened being who sees things as they are *javana* is either inoperative, or it operates but without leaving any dispositions which lead to future action. Deciding this question is complex and leads us back to the essential difference between the Buddhist and *Upaniṣadic* concepts of mind.

S.Z. Aung[29] makes the comment that some authorities on the *Abhidharma* are of the opinion that *javana* never obtains in the dream process. On the other hand Sarathchandra[30] points out that dreaming is "regarded as a cognitive process with the exception that it occurs through the door of the mind" (*manodvāra*) in contrast to the previous example in which it takes place through the door of one of the five external senses (*pañcadvāra*), e.g. the eye. Dreaming, according to Aung's authorities, would not be *karma* generating since *javana* does not obtain, even though a thought object is held to have been presented to consciousness throught he door of mind (*manodvāra*). In such a theory dreaming must approximate to the state of understanding available to an enlightened being, since both seem capable of cognitions, though neither generates *karmas* as a consequence. The *Abhidhārmika* tradition of Śri Laṅka[31] does not agree with this. In its view, the obtaining of *javana* is not dependent on waking or dreaming but rather on the intensity of the stimulus involved in initiating a process of cognition. In other words *karma* may obtain whether someone is awake or asleep.

The overall impression of *bhavaṅga* related doctrines is that they represent an attempt to address some of the objections raised by *Upaniṣadic* theories of mind without generating identical theories under a different guise. Unfortunately by accepting the challenge of the soul theory

29 Aung, S.Z. *Compendium of Philosophy* London, P.T.S. (1910) p. 47.
30 *op. cit.* p. 101
31 *ibid.* p. 101–2

of the *Brahmanas* while at the same time proposing a personal continuity represented by *bhavaṅga*, Buddhism is led three-quarters of the way towards the *Upaniṣadic* position. The only way to camouflage the close proximity of the two is for the Buddhist to propound a concept which remains deliberately difficult to pin down, and this seems to be what happened. *Bhavaṅga* was postulated to explain psychic continuity during deep sleep, and subsequently the carrying on of *karmic* factors, yet is is said to be cut off (*bhavaṅgupaccheda*) during cognition. If this is so how can it represent a "life continuum"? In fact *bhavaṅga* shows a strong functional correspondence to the *Upaniṣadic* soul (*ātman*) in that it is undisturbed in deep, dreamless sleep, yet it differs in that it ceases to exist when cognition arises. Under most conditions, when *bhavaṅga* is cut off by a stimulus which leads to cognition, processes take place which result in the generation of future acts. However when ignorance (*avidyā*) is uprooted this does not appear to happen. Someone having reached such a state is said to see things as they are (*yathābhūtam*), implying that there is cognition, though it is non-*karma* generating. In the state of undisturbed *bhavaṅga* the mind is said to be innate (*prakṛti*) and shining (*prabhāsvara*) yet this may be blemished by adventitious defilements (*āgantukakleśa*). By its impreciseness *bhavaṅga* clearly becomes a device to protect Buddhist notions of moral and psychic continuity, while at the same time the soul theory of the *Upaniṣads* is rejected.

It seems likely that some idea of mental continuity pre-dates the rise of the *Mahāyāna*. What then does Nāgārjuna have to say on the subject? There is actually little positive evidence of Nāgārjuna's adherence to a doctrine of psychic continuity in his writings, but there again, there is no evidence to suggest the opposite. We have noted that time and again he supports traditional postures and there is no reason to think that he does otherwise in this case. Certainly, it was common for schools of the proto-*Mahāyāna* to develop notions which served the same purpose in their system that *bhavaṅga* does in the systems we have already mentioned. The *Mahāsāṃghikas*, for example, held to the idea of a root consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*) visualised as the support (*āśraya*) of the visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna*) and other sense consciousnesses in much the same way as the root of the tree provides support for its leaves, branches etc.[32] Along similar lines the *Mahīśāsakas* distinguished between three different groups of *skandhas*. The first were held to be instantaneous (*kṣaṇaskandha*), the second to endure throughout a lifetime (*ekajanmāvadhiskandha*), while the final group were supposed to endure until the end of *saṃsāra* (*saṃsārakoṭiniṣṭhaskandha*), i.e. until *parinirvāṇa* is achieved. In his *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, Vasubandhu mentions these doctrines and holds them

32 For information on these analogues of *bhavaṅga* cf. L. de la Vallée Poussin: *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (1928) p. 178ff

to fulfill the same function as the idea of *bhavaṅga*, a doctrine which he attributes to the *Tāmraparṇīyas*. Ultimately they are synonymous with his concept of a store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).

> Dans les *sūtras* du *Tāmraparnīyanikāya*, ce *Vijñāna* (i.e. *ālayavijñāna*) est nommé *bhavāṅgavijñāna*; dans les *sūtras* du *Mahāsāṃghikanikāya*, *mūlavijñāna*; les *Mahīśāsakas* le nomment *saṃsāraniṣṭhaskandha*.[33]

Commenting on these various attempts to introduce continuity into psychic processes over extremely long periods of time Conze maintains:

> All these theoretical assumptions are attempts to combine the doctrine of "not-self" with the almost instinctive belief in a "self", empirical or true. The climax of this combination of the uncombinable is reached in such conceptual monstrosities as the "store-consciousness" (*ālayavijñāna*) of Asaṅga and a minority of *Yogācārins*, which performs all the functions of a "self" in a theory which almost vociferously proclaims the non-existence of such a "self". The "store-consciousness" is a fine example of "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds".[34]

Conze's judgement that the doctrine of *ālayavijñāna* is a conceptual monstrosity clearly derives from his *Prāsaṅgika* leanings and from a strong opposition to *Brahmanism* in any shape or form. However are his opinions borne out by textual evidence? As we have already said Nāgārjuna's known writings contain no treatment of conceptions such as *bhavaṅga*, while his only possible criticism of the *Yogācāra* notion of *ālayavijñāna* is to be found in the almost certainly incorrectly attributed *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*[35] which contains a seering wholesale indictment of *Yogācāra* doctrine lock, stock and barrel. This seems particularly strange considering the fact that there is no evidence to support the use of the term *Yogācāra* as a school of thought at the time of Nāgārjuna. Candrakīrti, writing at least 400 years after Nāgārjuna, certainly does quibble with the *Yogācāra* however. His opposition is based on the fact that, from an ultimate point of view, there is no Buddhist teaching at all.

> What hearing and what teaching (can there be) of the syllableless *Dharma*? Nevertheless the syllableless (*anakṣara*) is heard and taught by means of superimposition (*samāropa*).[36]

From his point of view the ultimate doctrine cannot be articulated, although at the conventional level (*saṃvṛti*) articulation may convey prag-

33 *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa* Takakusu, (ed.) xxxi, p. 785 col. 1 *ibid.* p. 178 n 2.

34 Conze, E. *Buddhist Thought in India* London (1962) p. 133–4.

35 cf. Lindtner *Nagarjuniana* (1982) p. 193ff.

36 *Madhyamakāvatāra* p. 178
yi ge med paḥi chos la ni
ñan pa gaṅ daṅ ston pa gaṅ
hgyur ba med la sgro btags pas
ḥon kyaṅ ñan źin ston pa yin/
cf. la Vallée Poussin (ed.) p. 265.

matic truth. In other words all articulated truth must, by definition, be conventional. He claims that the *Yogācāra* disregard this convention by holding their doctrines to be true from the ultimate point of view. By doing so, they are led astray. In fact throughout his critique of the *Yogācāra* he never disagrees with their doctrine from the point of view of conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*). He does not hold it to be incorrect or false (*mithyā*), but rather shows it to be a provisional position on the road to no position. As Olsen says:

> ... it might be said that for *Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika* all terms of justifiable provisional meaning, whether *ālaya* or *cittamātra*, or *tathāgatagarbha*, can be defended as pragmatically useful conventional truth, but the terms of final, explicit meaning are always negational: emptiness, non-origination ... No positive statement whatsoever can have final meaning.[37]

The criticism would be all very well if the *Yogācāra* of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga held the views attributed to it by Candrakīrti, but this is just not so. They actually agree with him that all dogmas must be, by definition, non-ultimate. They hold that the *ālayavijñāna* itself is overthrown on the path to *nirvāṇa*. Similarly the idea that the doctrine of *vijñaptimātra* or *cittamātra* implies the ultimate and sole existence of mind as Candrakīrti, and many modern scholars along with him suggest, is rather problematic.

In a series of important articles Schmithausen,[38] has attempted to trace the evolution of the *cittamātra* idea. He rejects the idea that the *Yogācāra* system arose in opposition to the apophatic character of early *Madhyamaka*, preferring instead to see the trend as one concerned primarily with spriritual praxis. In this he has some support from Conze.[39] In an initial study Schmithausen[40] identifies the earliest layer of *Yogācāra* tradition in the *Yogācārabhūmi*. For the most part, this text ..."presupposes the realistic ontology of the traditional schools of *Hīnāyana* Buddhism..."[41] and characteristic later terms such as mind only (*cittamātra*) and representation only (*vijñaptimātra*) are not to be found. However some later additions to the text, particularly the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, develop a doctrine, which Schmithausen denotes, "*Mahāyānistic* illusionism".[42] Here entities are taught to be designations only (*prajñaptimātra*)[43] and as such

37 Olsen (1974) p. 410.
38 Schmithausen (1973) and (1979)
39 Conze *op. cit.* p. 251
40 Schmithausen (1969)
41 Schmithausen (1979) p. 238
42 *ibid.* p. 239.
43 *Bodhisattvabhūmi* Wogihara (ed.) p. 43–4.
tatra kayā yuktyā nirabhilāpya svabhāvatā sarvandharmāṇāṃ
pratyavagantavyā yeyam svalakṣaṇa prajñaptir dharmāṇāṃ
yad uta rūpam iti vā vadaneti vā pūrvavad antato yāvan
nirvāṇam iti vā prajñaptimātram eva tad veditavyaṃ

they are conceived as real until the experience of suchness (*tathatā*) arises. For Schmithausen "*Mahāyānistic* illusionism" is the mid point on the path from traditional realism to full blown idealism. In the various discourses on meditation in the early *Yogācāra* there is a parallel line of development. From a position in which meditational images (*pratibimba*) are held to be constituted by a kind of subtle matter (*upadayarūpa*) Schmithausen detects a gradual shift within the text of the *Yogācārabhūmi* to a later view, expressed particularly in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* section that mediational objects are of a "purely ideal character."[44] It is classically in the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra*, especially in the eighth chapter, that the frequent use of the term *vijñaptimātra* is used not only of mediational images but also of ordinary objects of cognition. As such:

> ... the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* starts from the ideality of meditation objects... and then simply extends this fact to ordinary objects, without justifying this procedure by any rational argument. Thus... the oldest materials of the *Yogācāra* school clearly speak in favour of the theory that *Yogācāra* idealism primarily resulted from a generalisation of a fact observed in the case of meditation-objects, i.e. in the context of spiritual practice.[45]

For Schmithausen, then, the development of an idealistic *Yogācāra* philosophy is pragmatic, primarily designed to provide the metaphysical underpinning for prior meditational praxis. While the *Saṅdhinirmocanasūtra* appears explicitly idealistic, Schmithausen recognises the prior claims of the *Pratyutpannabuddhasammukhāvasthitasamādhisūtra* (*Pratyutpannasūtra* for short). Since this text was translated by Lokakṣema into Chinese in 179 AD it is obviously an early *Mahāyānasūtra*. It looks likely that this text represents an amalgamation of devotional "*Sukhāvati*" style texts with the more cerebral *Prajñāparāmitā corpus*".[46] Concerning itself primarily with meditational practice which ultimately leads to face to face contact with Amitābha, and other Tathāgatas, we hear that such an experience culminates in the thought:

> ... those Tathāgatas did not come from anywhere. These Triple Worlds are nothing but mind (*cittamātram*)... however, I discriminate things (*vikalpyate*), so they appear.[47]

While this text may be the first to "enunciate the thesis of universal idealism and to express this by the term *cittamātra*"[48] (i.e. well before the *Daśabhūmika*) Schmithausen goes to some pains to point out that while the *Pratyutpannasūtra* may intend to introduce the reader to the unreality of phenomena it does "not establish the mind as a higher reality".[49] The text

44 Schmithausen *op. cit.*
45 *ibid.* p. 241
46 Harrison (1978) p. 40.
47 *ibid.* p. 46.
48 Schmithausen *op. cit.* p. 249.

itself makes clear that the notion of *cittamātra* is merely a preliminary stage in the move to *śūnyatāsamādhi*, "the intuition of complete emptiness." Thus in the spiritual life the idea of mind-only must ultimately be abandoned. As such the designation "idealism" is at best highly provisional. Kambala in his *Ālokamālā*, a popular and didactic poem on *cittamātra* probably written in the early sixth century AD, when

> ... the academic life of *Mahāyāna* was totally governed by the religio-philosophical achievements and innovations of a large number of individual Yogācāra philosophers.[50]

tends to hold the same line despite a great deal of water having passed under the bridge. Despite its superficially idealistic flavour, Lindtner, in his study of the text which contains a good deal of material on the three nature doctrine, notes that for Kambala:

> The doctrine of *svabhāvatraya* ... is merely a meditational device presupposing the ontological doctrine of *cittamātra*.[51]

It looks likely that an equivalent degree of praxis and theory is retained throughout the *Yogācāra* period. True, Lindtner regards this text as an idealistic document, but the same restrictive sense applies here as in the above mentioned *sūtras* and *śāstras*, i.e. idealistic only in the most preliminary sense.

Now for Vasubandhu the *ālayavijñāna* performs a function parallel to that of *bhavaṅga* in other schools. It explains the continuity of thought after deep sleep and demonstrates how the mind can maintain its functioning after the attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*). In his *Karmasiddhi-prakaraṇa* Vasubhandhu uses the fact of *nirodhasamāpatti* as his prime proof for the existence of the store-consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). For him this *samāpatti* is a state with mind (*sacittaka*) as against the position of the *Vaibhāṣikas* who hold it to be non-mental (*acittaka*)—the complete annihilation of mind and mental activity. To account for the rising of the mind after such an experience the *Vaibhāṣikas* maintain that the power of the thought moment immediately prior to *nirodhasamāpatti* is sufficient to explain the continuation of thought once this state has ceased. Vasubandhu objects to this view. He holds that the *samāpatti* is a state which is *acittaka* in the sense that the six categories of consciousness (*ṣaḍvijñāna-kāya*) do not proceed, but is *sacittaka* in the sense that an underlying consciousness, the maturing consciousness (*vipākavijñāna*) continues to operate.[52] This maturing consciousness (*vipākavijñāna*) is a synonym for

49 *ibid.*
50 Lindtner (1985) p. 113.
51 *ibid.* p.117.
52 On this problem cf. Hakamaya (1975) p. 33–43.

the *ālayavijñāna*. It quite clearly performs the task that *bhavaṅga* accomplishes in other systems.

Rahula has conclusively demonstrated that the idea of an *ālayavijñāna* is not itself a novel idea for the *Yogācāra*.[53] The term *ālaya* is found many times in the *Tripiṭaka* of the *Theravādins*. Asaṅga himself maintains that the idea is known in the *Śrāvakayāna*, which is his general term for the *Hīnayāna*, and he refers to a passage from the *Ekottarāgama* to back this point up.[54] Lamotte has been able to find the parallel passage in the Pali.

> Mankind are fond of the *ālaya*, O *bhikkhus*, like the *ālaya*, rejoice in the *ālaya*; with the *Tathāgata* they pay honour to the *Dhamma*, they listen and pay an attentive ear to perfect knowledge.[55]

Actually the term *ālaya* crops up a number of times in the Pali canon and the commentaries explain it to mean "attachment to the five sense-pleasures".[56] The *ālaya* then is craved after by mankind and involves some implication in the world of sense enjoyment. Consequently it has no ultimacy. In fact the expression "uprooting of the *ālaya*" (*ālayasamugghāta*) is employed in the Pali as a synonym for *nirvāṇa*,[57] while in another place *nirvāṇa* is said to be "without *ālaya*" (*anālaya*).[58] *Ālaya* is destroyed on the path to *nirvāṇa* according to these early teachings. Since it does not survive the process of enlightenment it cannot be said in the ultimate sense to be truly existent. We have seen that *bhavaṅga* is a concept of the same order. It provides a continuous background on which to explain "personal" identity throughout existences, though since its operation is associated with the generation of *karma* one must assume that in the enlightened state it either ceases to function, or its mode of functioning is dramatically altered.

In his analysis of *vijñānaskandha* Asaṅga makes the following observation:

> What is the aggregate of consciousness (*vijñānaskandha*)? It is mind (*citta*), mental organ (*manas*) and also consciousness (*vijñāna*). And there what is mind (*citta*)? It is the *ālayavijñāna* containing all seeds (*sarvabījaka*) impregnated with the perfumings (*vāsanāparibhāvita*) of the *skandhas, dhātus* and *āyatanas*... What

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53 Rahula (1964) p. 55–57.

54 *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* p. 26.

55 *A*. ii. 131
ālayarāmā bhikkhave pajā ālayaratā ālayasammuditā, sā tathāgatena anālaye dhamme desiyamāne sussūyati sotaṃ odahati aññācittam upaṭṭhāpeti

56 *Papañcasūdanī-Majjhimanikāyāṭṭhakathā (MA)*. ii. 174
ālayarāmā ti sattā pañcasu kāmaguṇesu ālayanti

57 *A*. ii. 34
madanimmadano pipāsavinayo ālayasamugghāto vaṭṭupacchedo taṇhakkhayo virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ

58 *S*. iv. 372. 39
anālayañca vo bhikkhave desissāmi anālayagāmiñca maggaṃ

is the mental organ (*manas*)? It is the object of *ālayavijñāna*, always having the nature of self notion (*manyanātmaka*) associated with the four defilements, viz., the false idea of self (*ātmadṛṣṭi*), self-love (*ātmasneha*), the concept of "I am" (*asmimāna*) and the ignorance (*avidyā*)... What is consciousness (*vijñāna*)? It consists of the six groups of consciousness (*ṣaḍvijñānakāya*), viz. visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna*), auditory (*śrota*)—olfactory (*ghrāṇa*)—gustatory (*jihvā*)—tactile (*kāya*) and mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).[59]

Vasubandhu offers an identical scheme though he holds that *manas*, etc. are all evolved from consciousness by a process known as the transformation of consciousness (*vijñānapariṇāma*). This transformation (*parināma*) or maturation (*vipāka*) also takes place in three stages, the first stage being the *ālayavijñāna* which is said to contain all the seeds of defilement (*sarvabījaka*).

It (i.e. *ālayavijñāna*) exists as a flow, (ever changing) like a torrent. Its cessation occurs in attaining arhatship.[60]

This seems much the same as the early notion of *bhavaṅga*. The *ālayavijñāna* is a repository of *karmic* seeds due to reach fruition before *parinirvāṇa*. It therefore provides the necessary psychic continuity without at the same time assuming the proportions of the *Brahmanic* self for it ceases to function at the attainment of arhatship. The statement that it flows onwards like a torrent links us firmly into the traditional understanding of mind as in a state of continuous flux. Commenting on the idea of evolution (*parināma*), Sthiramati maintains:

Transformation means change (*anyathārva*). At the very moment at which the moment of cause comes to an end, the effect, different from the moment of cause, comes into being. This is transformation.[61]

Sthiramati is simply reiterating the classic notion of the mind in a condition of ignorance (*avidyā*). It is conditioned by the cause-effect relationship implicit in the forward sequence of the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula.

Going on to the second and third transformations, Vasubandhu repeats what Asaṅga has already said. He does, however, add that the mind organ (*manas*), the second transformation, is entirely absent in *nirodhasamāpatti*. This is also the case for an adept on the supra-mundane path

59 *Abhidharmasamuccaya* Pradhan (ed.) Visva-Bharati (1950) p. 11–12. The same definition is more briefly stated in *Mahāyānasūtralaṃkāra* p. 174 (xix. 76):
tatra cittaṃ ālayavijñāaṃ, manas tadālambanaṃ ātmadṛṣṭyādi
samprayuktaṃ, vijñānānaṃ ṣaḍ vijñānakāyāḥ

60 *Triṃś*. 4d-5a
tac ca vartate śrotasaughvavat
tasya vyāvṛttir arhatve

61 *Triṃś. bhāṣya* 16. 1–2
ko'yam parināmo nāma anyathātvam kāraṇa kṣana
nirodha samakālaḥ kāraṇa kṣanavilakṣaṇaḥ
kāryasyātmalābhaḥ parināmaḥ

(*lokottaramārga*).[62] Regarding the six groups of consciousness which comprise the third transformation, we are told that the mind consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is continually in operation apart from in certain exceptions:

> The five *vijñānas* rise in the root *vijñāna* (*mūlavijñāna* = *ālayavijñāna*) in accordance with the circumstantial cause (*pratyaya*), either together or alone; just like waves in the water. At all times there is the rise of mind consciousness with the exception of unconsciousness (*āsaṃjñika*), the two kinds of attainment (i.e. *asaṃjñisamāpatti* and *nirodhasamāpatti*), unconscious sleep and faint.[63]

While this may certainly hold for the *Triṃśikā* many scholars have felt less convinced of the position of its companion work, the *Viṃśatikā*. In his discussion of this text Dasgupta, for instance, claims it to teach that:

> ... all appearances are but transformations of the principle of consciousness by its inherent movement and none of our cognitions are produced by any external objects which to us seem to be existing outside of us and generating our ideas.[64]

Similarly, and more recently, May claims:

> La *Viṃśatikā* est une sorte d'introduction au système, plutôt critique que constructive... Avant d'exposer en detáil sa propre doctrine de l'idéalisme absolu, l'auteur s'attache à réfuter les objections...[65]

May maintains that Vasubandhu is constructing a system of absolute idealism, thereby repudiating the possibility of the existence of things independent of consciousness, while Dasgupta, though less explicit on this point, implicitly affirms such an interpretation throughout the rest of his essay. More convincingly, in view of our interpretation, Kochumuttam has argued that while the *Viṃśatikā* contains:

> A strong polemic against belief in objects (*artha*), it is very easily mistaken for a polemic against belief in things as such.[66]

Kochumuttam goes on to suggest that the correct way to understand Vasubandhu's epistemological position in this text is as a transformational theory of knowledge.[67] What he seems to mean here is that Vasubandhu holds knowledge to be, in some sense, a transformation of independently existing realities. In such a way Vasubandhu avoids the unwelcome conse-

62 *Triṃś.* 7b-d
...arhato na tat na nirodhasamāpattau mārge
lokottare na ca

63 *Triṃś.* 15 and 16
pañcānāṃ mūla vijñāne yathā pratyayaṃ udbhavaḥ
vijñānānām saha na vā tarangāṇāṃ yathā jale
manovijñāna saṃbhūtiḥ sarvadāsaṃjñikād ṛte
samapāttidvayān middhān mūrcchanād apy acittakāt

64 Dasgupta, S.B. *Philosophical Essays* Calcutta (1941) p. 198

65 May (1971) p. 296–297

66 Kochumuttam (1978) p. 25–26.

67 *ibid.* p. 202

quences of both subjective idealism and the realistic theories of the *Vaiśeṣikas* and *Kashmira-Vaibhāsikas*, both of whom he argues with in the *Viṃśatikā*.

One of the principal problems for the realist is making sense of dreams, illusions and hallucinations. Vasubandhu accepts that such experiences can be fully coherent, being determined both as regards space and time. He explains this coherence to be the result of the maturation of impressions (*vāsanā*) in consciousness itself. One does not therefore need to appeal to extra-mental entities to explain extra-sensory experience. The overall message of the early part of the *Viṃśatikā* is that the correspondence theory of knowledge will not hold in these special circumstances. It follows that:

> Experience does not guarantee one-to-one correspondence between concepts and extra-mental objects... Experience starts not with extra-mental objects, but with consciousness, which alone can supply the forms of subjectivity and objectivity which are necessary presuppositions of any experience in the state of *saṃsāra*.[68]

The most important section of the *Viṃśatikā* deals with a doctrine common to all our authors, be they Nāgārjuna or Asaṅga. This is the notion of the non-substantiality of persons and things (*pudgaladharmanairātmya*). Vasubandhu tells us that when the Buddha spoke about the twelve bases of cognition (*āyatana*), six of which are supposed by the *Abhidhārmikas* to be external (*bāhyāyatana*), the Enlightened One spoke with a hidden meaning:

> Conforming to the creatures to be converted the World-honoured One with secret intention said there are bases of cognition, visual etc., just as (there are) beings of apparitional birth.[69]

In other words, the naively realistic belief that there are sense organs and corresponding objects is not true from the ultimate point of view. The purpose of the Buddha's secret intention is further expanded:

> By reason of this teaching one enters into the non-substantiality of person; again by this teaching one enters into the non-substantiality of things with regard to their imagined nature.[70]

Expanding on this in his autocommentary (*vṛtti*) Vasubandhu introduces

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68 *ibid.* p. 209.

69 *Viṃś.* 8
rūpādy āyatanāstitvaṃ tad vineya janaṃ prati
abhiprāya vaśād uktaṃ upapāduka sattvavat

70. *Viṃś.* 10
yathā pudgala nairātmya praveśo hi anyathā punaḥ
deśanā dharma nairātmya praveśaḥ kalpitātmanā

the important distinction between the imagined (*parikalpita*) and the ineffable (*anabhilāpya*) natures of things:

> The theory of the non-substantiality of *dharmas* does not mean that *dharmas* are non-existent in all respects, but only in their imagined nature. The ignorant imagine the *dharmas* to be of the nature of subjectivity and objectivity, etc. Those *dharmas* are non-substantial with reference to that imagined nature and not with reference to their ineffable nature which alone is the object of the knowledge of the Buddhas.... Thus through the theory of representation-only (*vijñaptimātra*) the non-substantiality of *dharmas* is taught, not the denial of their existence.[71]

His critique of the atomic theory of the *Vaiśeṣikas*, and the notion of aggregates peculiar to the *Kashmira-Vaibhāsika* school of Buddhism, in stanzas 11–15 of *Viṃśatikā* indicates Vasubandhu's view that speculative theories, are generated by the imaginative tendencies of the mind and do not therefore correspond with reality. It is worth noting here that this is precisely the same assessment of speculative thought as is found in Nāgārjuna's condemnation of the own-being of *dharmas* (*dharmas-vabhāva*) in *MMK* ch. xv.

The sense of *Viṃśatikā* 16:

> Perception (can occur without extra-mental objects) just as it happens in a dream, etc. At the time that perception occurs the corresponding object is not found. How can one then speak of its perception.[72]

is simply that, as Kochumuttam concludes,

> ... the object arrived at in perception is never the thing-in-itself, but only the image constructed by the mind.[73]

In the light of the foregoing, and since Vasubandhu has affirmed the existence of the ineffable nature of *dharmas* which is the object of the knowledge of Buddhas alone, we can with some degree of certainty claim that our interpretive scheme of two epistemological orientations to an indeterminate ontological existence realm fits this text. It is clear that the imagined natures (*parikalpita ātmanā*) and the ineffable natures (*anabhilāpya ātmanā*) correspond to the *parikalpita* and *pariniṣpanna svabhāvas* of the *trisvabhāva* theory of the *Yogācāra*, bearing in mind our often repeated

71 *Viṃś.vṛtti* 10
na khalu sarvathā dharmo nāsti iti evam dharma nairātmya praveśo bhavati. api tu "kalpita ātmanā" (Vims.10) *yo bālair dharmānām svabhāvo grāhya grāhakādiḥ parikalpitas tena kalpitena ātmanā teṣaṃ nairātmyaṃ na tu anabhilāpyena ātmanā yo buddhānāṃ viṣaya iti. evaṃ vijñaptimātrasya api vijñapti antara parikalpitena ātmanā nairātmya praveśāt vijñaptimātra vyavasthāpanayā sarva dharmānāṃ nairātmya praveśo bhavati na tu tad astitva apavādāt.*

72 *Viṃś.*16
pratyakṣa buddhiḥ svapnādau yathā sā ca yadā tadā
na so'rtho dṛśyate tasya pratyakṣatvaṃ kathaṃ mataṃ

73 *op. cit.* 225

proviso that *parinispanna* is the complete identification with the ontological existence realm (=*paratantra*) when the latter is free from the contamination of the imagined (*parikalpita*). It is interesting to note here that Kochumuttam[74] sees the doctrine presented in *Viṃśatikā* as a seminal influence on the fully developed theories of the *Pramāna* school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. This school holds that the moment of perception (*pratyakṣa*) is essentially pure and devoid of imagination (*kalpanāpoḍha*). It is consequently incommunicable. On the other hand the process does not stop at this point for the unenlightened. New events follow the initial perception leading to distortion by the action of a multitude of thought constructions (*vikalpa*). We have noted previously that Liebnitz makes exactly the same distinction.[75]

In an interesting article, which dwells principally on the problem of the two Vasubandhus, Schmithausen[76] notes that the *Vimśatikā* contains no reference to the storehouse consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), preferring instead to use the term mental series (*vijñānasantānaḥ*) which like the *ālaya* is said to be the resting place of all traces (*vāsanā*). Similarly *Viṃś*. makes the progression from initial sense perception (*pratyakṣa*) to successive thought construction (*vikalpa*) the result of the workings of the mind consciousness (*manovijñāna*).[77] To Schmidthausen this mode of expression, which for him incidentally extends to the *Triṃśikā*, shows "unmistakable traces of the author's *Sautrāntika* past".[78] If this is so we should not be surprised to note similarities between the doctrines of the *Viṃśatikā* and those of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, since the later pair preserve unmistakable *Sautrāntika* influences in their own works. In the context of our overall thesis Vasubandhu's distinction between two states of knowledge is entirely appropriate and we can agree with Kochumuttam's suggestion that the epistemology of *Viṃśatikā* constitutes a transformation theory of knowledge. For the unenlightened transformation results in a world view with a status approximate to a dream. A Buddha on the other hand is awake and sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*):

> ... the apparent object is a representation. It is from this that memory arises. Before we have awakened we cannot know that what is seen in the dream does not exist.[79]

Since the awakened state is a possibility, and the object of cognition in this

74 *ibid.*
75 cf. ch. 6 *supra*.
76 Schmithausen (1967) p. 113.
77 *ibid.* p. 125 cf. *Viṃś* 16b and *vṛtti*.
78 *ibid.* p. 136.
79 *Viṃś*.17
uktam yathā tadābhāsā vijñaptiḥ smaraṇaṃ tataḥ
svapne dṛgviṣayābhāvaṃ nāprabuddho'vagacchati

state (if one can speak of cognition in its normal sense in such an elevated condition) is the ineffable nature of *dharmas*, one may suggest that the *Viṃśatikā* gives tacit support to an indeterminate ontological existence realm as the source of both the enlightened and unenlightened state.

In the final stanzas of the text Vasubandhu explains the mechanics of the operation of ignorance while at the same time demonstrating conclusively that he is not a solipsist. It is clear that in v.18 we find an explicit statement that a plurality of individual, though mutually conditioning, streams of consciousness do exist and that this situation is itself responsible for the ignorant world picture of the unenlightened:

> The representations of consciousness are determined by mutual influence of one (individual) on another...[80]

which the autocommentary (*vṛtti*) glosses:

> ... because a distinct representation in one stream of consciousness occasions the arising of a distinct representation in another stream of consciousness, each becomes determined, but not by external objects.[81]

This strikes a surprisingly modern tone in the writings of such an ancient writer, though Vasubandhu quickly reverts to a more magical view of things by suggesting in the next few stanzas, again to justify the existence of a plurality of individual streams of consciousness, that a magician may have the ability to cause another being to have a particular dream through the power of thought.[82]

Vasubandhu concludes his *Viṃśatikā* in a sober manner, noting that:

> This treatise on the mere representation of consciousness has been composed by me according to my ability; it is not possible however to discuss this (theory) in all its aspects. It is known only to the Enlightened One.[83]

He seems to accept the constraints put on him by recourse to language, and if the text appears to possess an excessively idealistic flavour this seems to be principally because he has allowed himself to expand provisional talk more fully than a strict *Prāsaṅgika* would permit.

There is no question here of a doctrine suggesting the sole existence of mind (*cittamātra*) as is so often attributed to the *Yogācāra*. Vasubandhu has not left the mainstream of Buddhist thought to suggest that perception arises through no cause, or even that the causes for the arising of perception can be contained entirely within the mental spehre. This is not

80 *Viṃś*. 18
anyonyādhipatitvena vijñapti niyamo mithaḥ

81 *Viṃś.vṛtti*. 18

82 *Viṃś*. 19 and *vṛtti*

83 *Viṃś*. 22
vijñaptimātratā siddhiḥ svaśakti sadṛśī mayā
kṛteyaṃ sarvathā sā tu na cintyā buddha gocaraḥ

subjective idealism. Vasubandhu clearly points out that the sense consciousnesses, or evolved consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) only arise in accordance with a cause (*pratyaya*). The cause is objective, as it has already been shown to be throughout the history of the development of Buddhist doctrine. In fact this theory of the threefold evolution of consciousness bears a striking resemblance to the theory of cognition discussed in connection with *bhavaṅga*. We saw in the latter theory that an external stimulus caused a perturbation in the flow of *bhavaṅga* giving rise to a series of changes which led to both perception (with concomitant distortion) and its consequence, i.e. the generation of *karma*. The *karma* generated by such a process "abides" in *bhavaṅga* as the cause of future actions up until the time of *parinirvāṇa* at which time *bhavaṅga* seems to cease. Exactly the same sequence is maintained in the *Yogācāra* system. An external stimulus provokes the evolution of *ālayavijñāna*, the resulting process "perfuming" (*vāsaṇa*) this root consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*) in such a way that it acts as a store of all the seeds (*sarvabīja*) of previous actions until arhatship is attained. At this point the *ālaya* itself comes to an end.

That this must be so is backed up by Asaṅga quoting with approval an excerpt from the *Samyuktāgama* to the effect that the five *skandhas* are devoid of self (*anātma*), etc.[84] This corresponds with the usual statement that the *skandhas*, and in this case we are dealing particularly with *vijñānaskandha*, are marked by suffering (*duḥkha*), impermanence (*anitya*), and non-self (*anātma*). Now since he clearly shows the *ālayavijñāna* to be but one, even though the most fundamental, relation to the *vijñānaskandha*, we must assume that for Asanga the *ālaya* itself is conditioned by these three marks of existence. *Ālayavijñāna* then is the *Yogācāra* term for the stream of consciousness (*viññāṇasota*), an idea we have already encountered in the early literature. It is said to progress like a stream, never the same from moment to moment, in a constant state of flux conditioned by ignorance until its momentum is impeded by the effort to destroy that ignorance by putting the *pratītyasamutpāda* into its reversal sequence through the application of the Buddhist path. This leads to a revolution at the basis (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*), i.e. a revolution in the *ālaya*.

Until this point has been reached cognition is still contaminated with the adventious defilements and one does not realise the true meaning of representation only (*vijñaptimātra*). Only the achievement of *vijñaptimātratā* is true enlightenment and in such a state one finally understands that all previous understanding was subjective (*cittamātra; vijñaptimātra*) for it was based on thought construction (*vikalpa*), and dichotomous thought (*prapañca*), etc., generated by a mind conditioned by ignorance

84 *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, *op. cit.* p. 15
This quotation may be traced to *S.* iii.142
...*māyūpamañca viññāṇam*...

after contact with external realities. In such a condition thought constructions is taken to be real, and things are not seen as they are (*yathābhūtam*). Enlightenment consists in the destruction of the subjective world view which results in the three domains of existence (*tridhātu*). All the early authorities we have examined, be they *Theravādin*, Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu or Asaṅga hold to such a position. Enlightenment then is the destruction of the diseased mind in its manifold forms. At the same time it is not to be understood as total non-existence. Vasubandhu sums up such a realisation in his treatment of *vijñaptimātratā*:

> This is no-mind (*acitta*) and no-perceiving, and this is wisdom (*jñāna*) beyond this world. This is the revolution at the basis (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*) at which the two fold wickedness [the defilements of emotion and intellect = *kleśāvaraṇa* and *jñeyāvaraṇa*] are removed. This is the realm of no out-flow (*anāsrava*). It is inconveivable, virtous and unchangeable. This is bliss, the body of emancipation. It is said to be the *dharma* (body) of the great sage.[85]

This is clearly *nirvāṇa*. Vasubandhu actually agrees with Candrakīrti that in the last analysis it is inconceivable (*acintya*), and in consequence inarticulable. It is the total suppression of the working of the *vijñānaskandha* since it is no-mind (*acitta*), but at the same time Vasubandhu avoids the implication that is non-existence, since he holds such a state to represent wisdom (*jñāna*). As a result of the destruction of the *avaraṇas* no further defilements are produced. For Yamada:

> Here the *vijñāna* turns into supra-mundane *jñāna*, transcendental wisdom in the higher level of the religious realm. In the *jñāna* there is no more conceptualisation regarding Self and Elements.[86]

There is nothing here that Nāgārjuna could have any objection to on our interpretation, and I believe we have clearly shown that whatever differences there may have been between the early period of Buddhist thought and that reflected by Nāgārjuna and the brothers Vasubandhu and Asaṅga, it is one of stress and not of essential discord.

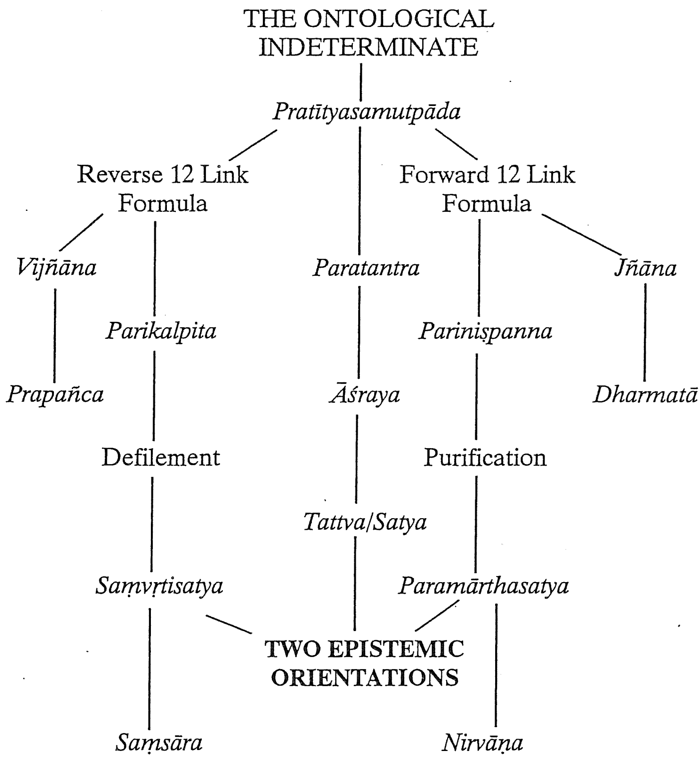
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85 *Triṃś*. 29 & 30
acitto 'nupalambho'sau jñānam lokottaraṃ ca tat
āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhā dauṣthulya hānitaḥ
sa eva anāśravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ
sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yam mahāmuneḥ

86 Yamada (1977) p. 171.

Conclusion

It is now possible to construct a model (diagram 1) to explain the interconnections, and essentially identical structure, of the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* understanding of the enlightened and unenlightened states.



There is an ontological existence realm which is not amenable to predication. Any attempt to describe it is doomed to failure since, by definition, description is intimately associated with a dichotomised world view based on the abstractive tendencies of a mind infected by ignorance. Since the structure of language itself is so infected it will be impossible to state the precise status of reality. Any definition will be dependent on such basic dichotomies as existence or non-existence. This being so one is inclined, bearing in mind what has been said throughout this work, to refer that state of being uncontaminated by the processes of thought as an Ontologically Indeterminate Realm. What is clear is that this is not to be understood in a monistic sense. The general opposition of Buddhism to

the *Brahmanical* systems precludes this. All the Buddhist authors studied above, either explicitly or implicitly, acknowledge this realm to be dependently originated (*pratītyasumutpāda*) in the sense that it is not composed of separate entities but rather exists as a flux of mutually conditioned processes. It may be understood as truth (*satya*) since it is the ground of being (*sat*). It is often referred to as thatness (*tattva*). In the *Madhyamaka* it is not referred to by name, for obvious reasons connected with the *Madhyamaka* theory of language, but this does not mean that its presence may not be inferred in the writings of Nāgārjuna, etc. In fact without such an existence realm at the basis of Nāgārjuna's system, the teachings lose their coherence. The *Yogācāra* is less reticent at providing a name, but again clearly recognises the provisional nature of such denotation. In line with earlier Buddhist tradition, reality is characterised in its aspect of dependence and hence, in the *Yogācāra*, it is termed the dependent (*paratantra*).

Now this central, ontologically indeterminate existence realm may be understood as the base (*āśraya*) for the arising of the purified and the defiled vision of the world. These ways of seeing are quite clearly the enlightened (*bodhi*) and the unenlightened respectively. The latter is intimately associated by thought construction (*vikalpa*) and dichotomous mental tendencies (*prapañca*), which themselves mutually condition the language process (*nāmarūpa/prajñapti*). As a result the mental processes of an unenlightened being (*vijñāna*) misinterpret reality as a conglomeration of entities (*dharma*) each capable of permanent and independent existence (*svabhāva*). In such a situation the mind habitually constructs a picture of reality from which there is no escape (*saṃsāra*), which is inherently unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*) and which leads to suffering. This condition unfolds itself in the forward sequence of the twelve-linked *pratītyasamutpāda* formula. The form of knowledge associated with this state is termed conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) by the *Madhyamaka*, and the imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) amongst the *Yogācārins*.

In line with the soteriological nature of Indian thought in general all the systems we have examined hold out the possibility of emancipation from this vicious circle through the destruction of ignorance. By putting into practice the Buddhist path (*mārga*), and by refraining from metaphysical speculation, unenlightened consciousness (*vijñāna*) may be extirpated, and gnosis (*jñāna/prajñā*) encouraged to flower. Such a transformation, since it is intimately connected with the destruction of the factors associated with ignorance and its concomitants, is adequately represented by the reverse *pratītyasamutpāda* formula. When this process is successfully completed one enters *nirvāṇa* and sees things as they are (*yathābhūtam*). Thought construction no longer operates (*nirvikalpajñāna*) and one comes to know the true nature of things (*dharmatā*). One is at peace (*śānta*). Such

a state is of course not knowledge in the conventional sense since it is empty (*śūnya*) of the presuppositions, such as the dichotomy between self and others, being and non-being, which provide the ground for the unenlightened state. Human perfection then is to be understood as the total destruction of all the factors associated with ignorance. As such *nirvāṇa* is inaccessible to the domain of language and thought. This is what emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is all about. Again both the *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* are agreed on this. For the former the enlightened state is referred to as the ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*), while for the latter it is the accomplished nature (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*). In the writings of both groups this condition is understood as the complete identification of knower and known. Both systems therefore regard the ultimate end of human perfection in non-dual terms. This being so it makes little sense to characterise early trends in *Mahāyāna* thought in either idealistic or realistic terms. The traditional Tibetan designation of *Yogācāra* as teaching mind only (*cittamātra*; tib: *sems-tsam*) is particularly unhelpful in this regard, especially when retrojected into the writings of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga. If one persists in talking of *nirvāṇa* as a state of mind one must constantly be aware of the provisional nature of such a statement. Both *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* authors are generally agreed on this matter.

It is hoped that the above discussion will have established a shared epistemological and ontological structure common to both *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*, at least in the early period of *Mahāyāna* philosophy. On this basis of general agreement one must regard scholarly attempts to highlight discrepancies between the two in a cautious manner. It is obviously true that from the time of Bhāvaviveka a rivalry, sometimes gentle, sometimes less so, existed between the two systems. Assessment of this rivalry depends on ones's attitude to the final centuries of development of Buddhism in its native land. Some will regard the sixth century debates between *Yogācārins* and *Mādhyamikas* as productive of the finest flowering of Buddhist philosophy. Others will see in these developments an indication of philosophical decadence and the start of the final slide into Tantric obscurity. Whatever one's perspective, the point is that all of these developments are late. Such rivalry cannot be traced in the seminal texts of either tradition. Nevertheless one should not be blind to the clear differences in style and terminology that exist between Nāgārjuna on the one hand and Asaṅga and Vasubandhu on the other. It would be quite wrong to conclude that later traditions in Buddhist literature are simply restatements of former work. New proccupations continually arise. Differing aspects of the Buddhist path rise to prominence to meet contempoarary needs, be they pedagogical or apolgetic. It seems likely that the prime focus of Nāgārjuna's attentions in his *yukti* corpus was directed towards matters ontological and logical, hence his extreme reluctance to explicitly commit

himself to a positive depiction of reality. Vasabaṇdhu and Asaṅga, on the other hand, and as the term *Yogācāra* implies, appear to show a greater interest in the complexities of the path. In this context an apparently looser perspective on ontology may be expected. These two authors concentrate on the strong motivating factor necessary if one is to make the fundamental changes consistent with the life of a Buddhist. This said one hopes that the model which unfolds in the text above will help in the appreciation of the essential harmony underlying the thought of Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, particularly when seen against the background of earlier Buddhist traditions in ontology and epistemology.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
A.A.	*Aṅguttara Nikāya Atthakathā Manorathapūraṇī*
A.K.	*Abhidharmakośa* la Vallée Poussin (ed.)
Ā.M.	*Ālokamālā* in Lindtner (1985).
C.S.	Catuḥstava cf. Lindtner *Nagarjuniana* 121–161
D.	*Digha Nikāya*
J.I.A.B.St.	*Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*
J.I.B.St.	*Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*
J.I.P.	*Journal of Indian Philosophy*
K.T.R.	*Kalatalaratna*
Laṅka	*Laṅkāvatarasūtra* Nanjio (ed.)
M.	*Majjhima Nikāya*
M.A.	*Majjhima Nikāya Atthakathā Papañcasūdanī*
M.C.	*Maitreya Chapter*
MCB	*Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques*
M.H.K.	*Madhyamakahṛdayakārikā*
M.M.K.	*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*
M.R.P.	*Madhyamakaratnapradīpa*
MS.	*Mahāyānasaṃgraha*. Lamotte (ed.)
M.V.	*Madhyāntavibhāgakārikā* Lévi and Yamaguchi (ed.)
P.E.W.	*Philosophy East and West*
P.P.	*Prajñāpāramitā*
P.P.D.	*Prajñāpradīpa*
S	*Saṃyutta Nikāya*
Sn.	*Sutta Nipāta*
Ś.S.	*Śūnyatāsaptati* cf. Lindtner *Nāgārjuniana* 31–69
T.	*Taisho Shinsū Daizōkyo*
Triṃś	*Triṃśikākārikā* Lévi (ed.)
T.S.N.	*Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* Mukhopadhyaya (ed.)
U.	*Udāna*
Viṃś.	*Viṃśatikākārikā* Lévi (ed.)
Vin.	*Vinaya*
V.V.	*Vigrahavyāvartanī* Johnston and Kunst (ed.)
Y.Ṣ.	*Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* cf. Lindtner *Nagarjuniana* 100–120

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